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"KIN I BELIEVE ME EYES?" CRIED OLD BENZINE. "IS IT YOU, SWEET WILLIAM, OR YER GHOST?"

OR, THE CIRCUS AT WHITE GOPHER.

BY ALBERT W. AIKEN,
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OF CINNABAR," "THE FRESH OF 'FRISCO,"
"JOE PHENIX, THE POLICE SPY," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE DRIVER AND THE SPORT.

ABOUT the liveliest town in the Territory of New Mexico, at the time of which we write, was the mining-camp in the White Oaks district known as Golden Plume.

It boasted of nearly five hundred inhabitants, and as all the mines in the neighborhood were doing well the town had quite a boom.

There was a hack line which ran once a week between Golden Plume and White Oaks, affording a means of communication with the outer world.

It was an all-day journey; the hack left White Oaks at seven in the morning and arrived at Golden Plume at five in the afternoon.

It was not that the distance was so great but the road was in such a dreadful state that the

horses were not able to do better than five miles an hour over the greater part of the road.

On this particular morning on which we begin our tale, the hack from White Oaks only had a single passenger on board, and that passenger was of a class that rarely traveled over this particular route.

A young and good-looking girl, a lady born and bred, evidently, from the way she carried herself.

"No common trash!" as Long Hank, the driver of the stage, observed to the agent of the Express Company in White Oaks, after the lady had entered the hack, thus affording the Jehu an opportunity to inspect her.

She was neatly dressed in dark clothes; tall and finely formed, with regular features, lit up with great, gray eyes, so dark in color that they seemed to be black; her hair was as ebon in hue as the raven's wing and fully as lustrous as the plumage of that ill-omened bird.

She was not over twenty, yet had a resolute, fearless way with her, and acted more like an old, experienced woman of the world than a young and, presumably, timid girl. But the firm, squarely-cut chin, and the strong lines about the mouth, showed that the girl had a dauntless will, and a good judge of human nature would have set her down as being capable of taking care of herself in any situation.

The stage only made one stop between White Oaks and Golden Plume, and that was at a little settlement in the mountains known as Murphy's Clearing, which was just about half-way.

Here dinner was provided for the passengers, and the horses were fed.

The stage arrived at Murphy's on time, and Long Hank, in the most gallant manner, escorted the lady passenger into the dining-room.

After the meal was ended, the driver conducted the lady back again to the hack.

"I am very much obliged to you for your kindness," she said, her voice particularly sweet and melodious.

"Don't mention, miss!" the driver replied, with an elaborate bow. "It does me proud to be able to help you along. I'm no rough and tough Western rustler! I'm from old York State, I am, and I have handled the ribbons over some of the best stage lines in the northern part of that country, and when thar's a lady in my hearse, I reckon I know how to do the per-lite thing by her," and then Long Hank made another elaborate bow.

"You are very kind indeed," the lady responded, with her sweetest smile, as she settled back in her seat.

The driver turned away and winked in a knowing manner at the keeper of the Half-way House, who stood in his doorway with a broad grin on his face.

Just at this moment the driver was accosted by a stranger, who came hurrying up.

The new-comer was a man of thirty or thereabouts, a little above the medium height, splendidly built, his muscular proportions giving assurance of uncommon strength.

His features were regular and clearly cut, and the massive chin showed that he was a man possessed of wonderful resolution, as was also evidenced by the expression of his dark eyes, which were as bright and keen as those of a hawk.

He was dressed in a dark business suit, rather the worse for wear, still neat and respectable.

In the streets of a great city he would have been taken for a bank clerk, or a professional man, for his white hands, and general bearing, betrayed that he did not gain his bread by hard manual toil.

But in this wild western land a man dressed as the stranger was is usually set down for a "sport;" a gentleman who makes his living by the use of his wits, and, as a rule, the guess is not far out of the way.

"I am just in time, I see," the stranger exclaimed as he came up.

"Just in time for wot?" the driver responded in an extremely rough and insolent way.

The new-comer appeared to be surprised at the tone of the other, and he surveyed Long Hank from his head to his feet for a moment, a peculiar light shining in his dark eyes.

"My dear sir, you have a very strange way of speaking," the gentleman remarked, in a quiet tone. "I may say, a decidedly offensive way and I assure you that it is extremely unbecoming."

"If you don't like the way I talk you needn't to speak to me," the driver retorted, his tone as full of insolence as before.

"Say, my man, what on earth has bit you?" the stranger exclaimed in a tone of astonishment.

"Something will bite you if you sling any loose guff 'round hyer!" the driver declared in a very warlike way.

The driver was standing by the side of his horses, a yard or two from the coach door, but his loud tones reached the ears of the lady and she looked out of the window to see what was the matter.

The stranger caught sight of the lady and immediately conjectured that her presence had something to do with the driver's ugliness.

"Oho! the fellow wants to pass as a bully because there is a woman in the neighborhood, and he thinks he can bluff me," was the comment that passed through the mind of the stranger and then he said aloud, very quietly:

"My dear sir, as I see there is a likelihood of our holding considerable of a discussion, and as the conclusion to which we may come will hardly be likely to prove agreeable to the lady, would it not be well if we moved around to the other side of the house so as to be out of her sight?"

The speech was spoken in so low a tone that though it was perfectly plain to Long Hank yet it did not reach the lady's ears.

The driver was a little astonished, for he understood that the stranger had "called his bluff" to use the sporting phrase.

Long Hank prided himself upon his gameness though, and he was not the man to refuse an invitation of this kind, although it was altogether unexpected.

"All right! that will suit me to death!" he exclaimed with a swagger. "I am jest the kind of man that you want to talk to! You can't hitch me wrong, and I am as sound as a dollar!"

"Come along then!" the stranger responded in the most pleasant and friendly way possible.

The lady sunk back again in her seat, deceived into the belief that there wasn't going to be any trouble.

The two men sauntered around the corner of the hotel and Murphy, who was too keen an Irishman to be fooled by the placid manner of the stranger, followed after, for he had a suspicion that there was going to be some fun.

The stranger proceeded to the back of the hotel, then halted and, turning around, faced the driver, who glared at him in an extremely warlike way.

"Now then, sir, that we are out of sight and hearing of the lady, I want to say a few quiet words to you," he remarked.

"You kin sail in and work yer jaw-bone for all it is worth!" Long Hank declared.

"Your tone is offensive, and your manner disagreeable, and it is utterly without reason too, for I am a stranger to you and there is not the slightest cause for your acting in any such way. I am going to take passage with you to Golden Plume, and as an agent of the hack line it is your duty, as it should also be your pleasure, to treat your passengers with politeness and civility."

"Say! you are a kind of long-winded cuss, ain't you?" the driver exclaimed. "And from this hyer specimen that you have given me I reckon that you kin sling words around as loosely as any man in this deestric."

"Well, I do not know about that. I am a stranger here, and so am not acquainted with the acquirements of your citizens, but, as a rule, I think I usually succeed in making myself understood."

"Oh, you'll pass all right when it comes to slinging good United States talk!" the driver responded.

"Say, you are a sport, ain't yer?" Long Hank asked, abruptly.

"Yes, I suppose I am."

"And you don't know me?"

"No, this is the first time that I have ever stacked up against a man of your size. You will excuse my using a professional term, but it seems to fit the situation just now," the stranger observed, with a pleasant smile.

"Oh, that is all right! You can't talk no lingo of that kind, that I can't catch onto!" the other declared.

"You are a sport and you want to ride in my hearse to Golden Plume?" the driver asked.

"Yes, that is my lay-out just at present."

"It will cost you two solid chucks and a half!"

"No trust, eh?" the sport inquired, with a beaming smile.

"Wal, now you kin bet yer sweet life thar ain't!"

"I will tell you what I will do. I will throw dice with you to see whether I pay the fare or ride free," the other suggested.

"No, you don't, by a jugful!" Long Hank exclaimed, immediately. "If you can't pony up two chucks and a half, nary a foot to Golden Plume do you ride in my hearse!"

"Is that so?" the sport inquired, in a quizzical way.

"You kin jest bet all you are wuth it is!" the driver, asserted, with great dignity.

"I was only joking, my long-legged friend," the stranger declared, with a laugh. "I am able to pay my way. For proof, gaze upon this yellow-boy," and the speaker drew a five-dollar gold-piece from his pocket, and held it up between his thumb and forefinger.

"You see I am sufficiently well-provided with the needful to enable me to make the trip to Golden Plume," he continued. "You want two dollars and a half—take it out of this and return me the change."

"Hain't got no change!" the driver replied, in a sulky way. "Wot do you take me for? Do you think I am a national bank, to go lugging a lot of cash around the country? No, sir-ee! I don't do business in that way. You may have fifty of them yaller-boys, as you call 'em, for all I keer, but you don't ride no foot toward Golden

Plume till you put me down two solid plunks and a half, and don't you forget it!"

"I reckon I will have to ask you to change this for me," the sport said, turning to Murphy, who was an interested spectator, grinning in delight at the discussion.

"Oh, yes, I will be afther accommodating yez," the Irishman replied, hauling out a handful of coins and making the change.

"Much obliged," returned the sport, with a bow.

"Say, what do you want to do that for?" exclaimed Long Hank, angrily. "Can't you see that I don't want this galoot to ride in my hearse?"

Murphy looked astonished at this outburst, but the sport did not seem to be surprised.

"Phat the devil's got inter yez?" the Irishman cried in wonder.

"You see you have surprised our friend, the landlord, here," the sport remarked. "But I am not affected in that way, for I concluded that you had in mind some little game of this kind right at the beginning."

"Oh, you did, did you?" the driver growled.

"Yes, I did. I don't exactly understand why you want to try any such thing, and I will thank you to explain."

"Thar's a lady in that hearse," Long Hank declared, in an impressive way, shaking his bony forefinger at the stranger.

"Yes, I saw her. I am not blind," the sport rejoined, tartly.

"And I want you to understand that she is the real genuine article and no mistake!"

"Well, who said she wasn't?"

"Wal, now, I hain't made up my mind that it is quite proper to 'low any low-down, mean miserable gambler like you to ride in the same hearse with a first-class, elegant she-male like this hyer plum bird on a lily root!" the driver declared in an extremely arrogant way.

Lightning flashed from the dark eyes of the sport and he seemed to grow a couple of inches taller as he clinched his fist and looked the driver full in the face.

"Take that back, you miserable hound, or I will hammer you within an inch of your life!" he cried with fiery energy.

"Wot's that?" fairly howled the driver, so surprised was he by the defiance.

And then doubling up his big fists he made a rush at the sport.

In a rough-and-tumble fight Long Hank was counted to be a good man, and he had mentally resolved that when he got the sport in his grasp he would treat him to a "bar hug" which would go pretty nearly to, squeezing the life out of him.

But the sport knew a trick worth two of this, and he had no notion of letting the other come to close quarters, so as the driver rushed upon him he met him with a straight right hand bit between the eyes which laid Long Hank prostrate upon the flat of his back, and for the moment more stars flashed before the eyes of the stricken man than he had ever imagined existed in the heavens.

And to add to the driver's discomfiture when he fell he came down in such a clumsy way that he hit the back of his head an awful rap against the hard ground.

Murphy was fairly beside himself in his delight at being able to witness such a display.

He hopped up and down like a dancing Jack in his excitement.

"Oh, murther and turf! isn't it beautiful!" he cried.

The stage-driver was game though, and was not satisfied to cry quits yet awhile.

He got on his feet as soon as he possibly could, and made another clumsy rush at the sport.

He had learned wisdom though from his previous experience and was a deal more cautious in his advance this time, but it availed but little, for the sport banged him in the ribs with his iron-like right fist, the blow falling with such force that for the moment Long Hank was sure a couple of his ribs were broken, and then the sport got in a powerful "left hand swing" which caught the driver on the jaw, apparently loosening every tooth he had in his head, and sent him to "grass" with the impression that the hotel had suddenly fallen on him.

Murphy capered up and down.

"Oh, tare and ounds! Oh, be the howly smoke! Oh, musba!" he cried. "Rise up, Hank, ye divel, and if yez are kilt say so!"

It was fully a minute before the driver moved.

Never before in all his life had such liberties been taken with his person, and yet in the course of his wanderings he had been in many a fierce row.

But it was the first time though, that he had ever faced a first-class man, as far as strength and skill went, and who had the scientific training which enabled him to put every pound of his in his blows.

Slowly, Long Hank rose to a sitting posture and looked with wonder upon his conqueror.

The sport comprehended from the expression upon the face of the other that the battle was over, so he rested his arms upon his hips and, in the politest way, remarked:

"I hope you have changed your mind about

this little matter and that you will allow me to ride to Golden Plume in your hack?"

"By gum! you kin ride—don't you make no mistake 'bout that—you kin drive the durned old hearse if you want to! You own the hull blamed outfit now for all of me!" Long Hank cried, and then he rose slowly to his feet, sore in every limb.

"Oh, no; all I want is two dollars and a half's worth of it—a ride from here to Golden Plume," the sport replied.

The driver surveyed the speaker from top to toe and then shook his head in a dubious way.

"I am blamed if I understand it!" Long Hank declared. "I have run up ag'in some good men in my time but you take the cake!"

"What kind of sports do you have in this country?" the stranger demanded. "Are they men who are not able to hold their own?"

"Oh, yes, but I reckon you will travel far and look long before you strike a man like yourself," the driver replied.

"You ought to see my brother—"

"No, by gum! I don't want to!" Long Hank declared, hastily. "One of your family is enuff for me, I hope I may never strike another one, for I am no hog!"

"It is an illigant pair of black eyes ye have, Mister Hank, to carry inter Golden Plume wid ye!" the Irishman exclaimed with a prodigious grin.

"Yes, I reckon I will have to give the boys a ghost story 'bout being kicked by a mule in the corral at White Oaks," the driver remarked in a woeful way.

"Faix! a mule couldn't have damaged yez much worse!" Murphy declared.

"I reckon it will pass, unless, stranger, you want to go 'round bragging how you laid me out," the driver observed to the sport.

"Oh, I shall not say anything about the matter," the other replied. "I don't covet the title of a fighting man, and I do not doubt from what little I have seen of Golden Plume that I shall get into a row quickly enough there to enable the boys to see what kind of a man I am."

"I reckon though that you won't astonish any galoot in the camp more than you have astonished me!" the driver declared. "What is your handle, by the way?"

"Keene—William Keene!"

"Keene, eh? Wal, you are Keene by name and keen by natur!" the driver observed as he led the way to the hack.

He mounted to the box, and took up the lines, the sport got inside, then away the vehicle went.

CHAPTER II.

AN EXCHANGE OF CONFIDENCES.

The stage was nothing but a common, cheap, ordinary four-seated hack.

The lady sat in the back seat so the sport took the front one.

He bowed to her politely upon entering the vehicle, and she had returned the salutation, then he gazed out of the window while the lady studied his face for a few moments as though endeavoring to make out what kind of a man he was.

Ten minutes went by without the silence being broken.

Keene was conscious that the lady was surveying him with a searching glance as though she would read his very soul, but this did not worry him in the least, and he pretended not to be conscious of it.

"The scrutiny may amuse her and it certainly does not hurt me," was the thought that came to him when he became aware of the inspection.

"I beg your pardon, sir," the lady said at last and quite abruptly. "But do you live in Golden Plume?"

"Yes, miss, it is my residence at present," he replied, withdrawing his attention from the landscape and fixing it upon the lady.

"And are you well acquainted there?"

"No, I cannot say that I am. You see, I am a stranger," he explained. "I came to the camp about a week ago. I was with a party who came across the mountains from the West, only stayed three days in the camp, and then came to Murphy's Clearing."

"I hope you will pardon me if I seem to be curious," the lady remarked, after a little pause, during which she seemed to be revolving something in her mind.

"Oh, certainly, of course."

"I am a perfect stranger to this country, and I should like to gain some information about the place to which I am bound."

"I shall be glad to give you any information that I possess," the sport remarked. "Although I fear that it will not be of much service to you, although in such a camp as Golden Plume a few days' sojourn to a man who keeps his eyes and ears open will put him into possession of about everything in connection with the town worth knowing."

"Yes, so I would imagine, for I am aware that it is quite a small place," the lady remarked. "That is, it would be considered not to amount to much if the town was situated in a well-settled region, but with the peculiar exaggeration

common to the Wild West, the people of this region speak of it as though it was of great importance and would one day be a metropolis."

"Yes, that is a common Western failing," the sport responded, with a smile. "Every little camp is a Chicago or Kansas City in embryo, and the people in it affect to believe that it is going to be the great city of the section. The air of the region is remarkably bracing, you know, and perhaps that accounts for the rose-colored way in which the inhabitants regard the prospects of their towns."

"I expected to learn something about Golden Plume at White Oaks; you see I thought I would have to wait there," the lady explained. "But as it happened, I arrived just in time to catch this stage, and did not stop at White Oaks over fifteen minutes."

"Pretty quick work."

"Yes, and I was glad it was so, for I was anxious to get on. If I had not caught this stage, I should have had to wait in White Oaks a week, and that would have been unpleasant."

The expression upon the mobile face of the gentleman showed that he did not exactly understand how this could be, but he was too polite to ask questions.

"Would you mind telling me your name?" the lady asked, abruptly, but she smiled sweetly as she put the question.

"Certainly not! My name is William Keene," the sport replied, promptly.

"And mine is Adrienne Richmond," she observed. "You see we will have to introduce ourselves, as there is no one else by," and she laughed merrily at the idea.

"Oh, well, in a region like this people cannot stand upon ceremony."

"Will you excuse me if I ask you a question?" Miss Richmond exclaimed, in her peculiar, abrupt way.

"Of course."

"Didn't you have some trouble with the driver before we started?"

The sport glanced quickly at his hands, and then at the bosom of the fawn-colored flannel shirt which he wore; he was not aware that any blood had been drawn, but the question made him think that it was possible there was some on either his clothes or hands, and this fact led her to suspect there had been trouble.

The lady guessed the thoughts that were in his mind.

"Oh, there isn't anything about your person to suggest that you have been engaged in any difficulty," she said. "But I heard the voice of the driver raised high in apparent anger, and then the cries of the Irishman, which made me suspect that you were having trouble with the driver."

"Well, there was a little misunderstanding," the sport responded.

"Yes, I should judge so, from the looks of the driver's face. I caught sight of him as he mounted the box, although I was careful not to allow the man to see that I was looking at him."

"Yes, the fellow is one of those arrogant Westerners, half-horse, half-alligator, who are disposed to bully quiet-appearing men who do not go around with a whole arsenal of weapons strapped to their waists."

"I judge that you handled him pretty roughly, though," the lady observed, with an admiring glance at the muscular proportions of the gentleman.

"Yes, I fully satisfied him that he had made a mistake in his man," the sport replied in his quiet way. "And the joke of the matter is that it was on your account that he picked a quarrel with me."

"On my account?"

"Yes; I will tell you all about it. The fellow picked me out for a sport—a gambler, in short—and as I think that a man should always tell the truth when he can, I admitted that his judgment was correct, and then he said that I could not go to Golden Plume in this coach, as I was not fit to associate with a lady like yourself."

"What an idea! As if in traveling in a public conveyance we could select our companions."

"I had to hammer the man until I knocked some sense into him," the sport remarked.

"I do not pretend to be one whit better than I am, you know," he continued, earnestly.

"But it is utter nonsense to suppose that even if I am a sport and follow gambling for a living I am going to contaminate anybody by riding in the same hack with them."

"No, it is not reasonable, and then it is strange that the man should take such a fancy into his head, in a country like this too, where almost everybody seems to gamble, and where the business is carried on as openly as a grocery store or a meat market."

"Oh, it was merely one of those odd notions that men sometimes take into their heads. He felt in the mood for a quarrel and picked me out for a victim."

"But events did not turn out exactly as he anticipated though," the lady observed, smiling.

"This is a very uncertain world," the sport replied. "And many a man who goes in on a sure thing comes out at the little end of the horn. Take my own case for instance. I met a man in Golden Plume, on the first day of my

arrival there, who pretended to take a wonderful fancy to me; he made me an offer to come to Murphy's Clearing and take charge of a mine which he said was destined to turn out to be one of the biggest strikes ever made in this region."

"Well, I will admit frankly that I am not over and above fond of the life of a sport, and whenever an opportunity comes in my way to go into any other line, which seems to promise more than a bare living, I am always ready to embrace it, so I jumped at the chance which this gentleman offered, and came with him to Murphy's Clearing."

"Now, I am an old and experienced man of the world—have seen a good deal of life, and I flatter myself that I am not easily made a fool of, but this guileless-appearing chap, with his innocent ways, completely took me into camp. He was an out and out fraud—a humbug from beginning to end. His claim was a good one, but the gold in such shape that expensive machinery was needed to work the ore, and in some way the idiot got it into his head that if he could get me interested in the property I would be able to raise the money to put in the machinery."

"People do get such wild ideas sometimes."

"And, mind you, I had not said a word to lead the man to suppose that I had wealth, or could command any backing," the sport remarked. "On the contrary I had said, in the frankest manner possible, that I did not have any more money than I knew what to do with, but the fellow did not believe I was speaking the truth; he fell into the mistake of taking me for a tenderfoot, and thought I was lying when I said I had no money."

"The wish was father to the thought."

"Yes; well, the truth was that I had exactly ten dollars when I arrived in Golden Plume, and by the time I got to Murphy's Clearing the ten had been reduced to five. I talked pretty plainly to my mine-owner when he revealed his little scheme, but I will do the fellow justice; although he was terribly disappointed, yet he expressed himself as being very sorry that he had troubled me and offered to pay me for my trouble; that is, he would owe me whatever sum I thought was right, for gold and silver he had none," the sport added, with a laugh.

"It was an unfortunate affair for you," the lady remarked, thoughtfully. "You had little money enough in the beginning without frittering any of it away."

"That is true and in my business a man must have some cash to go on or he cannot hope to make anything. As it is I shall strike Golden Plume with the magnificent sum of two dollars and a half in my pocket."

"I can sympathize with you for I am in exactly the same condition!" Miss Richmond declared.

"Is it possible?"

"Yes, only that my wealth is over double yours for I have about six dollars."

"But you have friends, of course, to whom you are going?" the sport remarked, decidedly interested in his companion.

"Well, I am not certain in regard to that," the lady replied. "And that is why I wished to question you in regard to the town."

"I am not sure that I can give you much information, but you are quite welcome to what I possess."

"Yes, I felt sure of that the moment you entered the carriage," Miss Richmond declared. "I am very quick to come to a conclusion, and after I had studied your face for a moment I felt sure you could be trusted."

"I am very glad indeed to know that you have such a good opinion of me," the sport remarked.

"Although I am not very old in years, yet I have seen a great deal of the world, and think I am a good judge of mankind," the lady said, earnestly.

"I am at present strangely situated," she continued, "and I need a friend in whose wisdom I can trust. We are strangers, and you are a man whose ways of life would not be considered blameless, and yet I am inspired with the belief that I can fully trust you."

"I assure you that I feel honored by your confidence," the sport replied. "I am not a man who cares to speak much in regard to himself, but I will say that I do not know any one who ever trusted to me and had reason to regret the confidence afterward."

"That was the opinion I formed of you," Miss Richmond observed. "And now I will explain how it is that I am situated as I am. You must pardon me if I do not give a full explanation, but at present I think that it will be wisest for me not to do so."

"Do as you think best about that by all means."

"Of course I can depend upon you not to speak to any one about the matter."

"Certainly. You can rely upon me."

"Being a woman, I am a strong believer in presentiments, like the most of my sex," the lady said. "And ever since I began my journey to the West I have been haunted by a fear that some dire misfortune threatened me."

"Yes, I can understand that sort of thing," the gentleman remarked, thoughtfully. "As a sport I am a strong believer in luck, and there

is no denying that some people have presentiments which turn out to be remarkably true."

"Well, I do not know whether I am particularly gifted in that way or not, but most certainly some presentiments which have come to me have enabled me to escape dangers which would have proved to be very serious in their consequences if I had not heeded the warning and prepared to meet them."

"You are certainly justified then in paying serious attention to any presentiments that you may have," the sport remarked.

"Yes, so I believe. Now I have come to Golden Plume on a certain errand, and a gentleman in the camp is connected with my business. During my brief stay in White Oaks I inquired of the Express agent in regard to him; the man had newly come to White Oaks—had never been to Golden Plume, and did not know much about the town, so I did not succeed in gaining any information. He had never heard of the party for whom I inquired, but perhaps you know of him."

"If he is a prominent man in the town it is possible that I have."

"He is the owner of the largest mine there, the White Gopher property."

"Oh, yes, I have met the gentleman!" the sport exclaimed. "He was one of the few to whom I was introduced during my brief sojourn in the town. The Murphy's Clearing man introduced me to him in the saloon of the Metropolitan Hotel; that's the principal hotel in the town, and he seemed to be a very nice fellow indeed, and my partner said that there wasn't a liver man in the camp than El Van Buren, as they all called him."

"Haven't you made a mistake in the name?" the lady inquired, a troubled look upon her face.

"No, that is correct."

"But Victor Kingsley is the proprietor of the property. Elliott Van Buren is the working manager, merely."

"Well, I did not understand it in that way," the sport responded, apparently surprised by the statement. "Yes, I am sure I am correct, for the conversation was upon mining matters, and this Mr. Van Buren told how he had improved the White Gopher property since it came into his possession, and when my man suggested that as he was all alone in the speculation it would be a good idea for him to get some partners who could put in capital, he responded that he had all the money needed to run the mine and that he did not believe in partners."

"It is very strange," the lady observed, slowly. "For six months ago Victor Kingsley owned the property, and this Mr. Van Buren was the working manager. It was the arrangement so frequently made: Mr. Kingsley was not a practical miner, but a man of wealth, and he gave this Mr. Van Buren an interest in the property on account of his being an expert miner."

"Yes, I see, and I am afraid that in this case it was the old joke over again," the sport remarked. "In the beginning Kingsley had the money and the other man the experience. Now Kingsley has the experience and Van Buren the money."

"I am afraid that it is that way, but I do not understand what can have happened, for only three months ago Mr. Kingsley was in control of the property."

"In three months' time much may happen, you know," the sport observed, thoughtfully. "Now, I do not wish to appear as if I wanted to pry into your business, but I fancy from what you have said that this Mr. Kingsley is the gentleman whom you have come to see."

"Yes, that is true. I have no desire to conceal the fact from you, and I will not deny too that I have a grave apprehension that all is not right," and a sad, earnest look came over the handsome face of the girl as she spoke.

"Suppose that Mr. Kingsley has left Golden Plume?" the sport questioned.

"Then I will be in a bad way indeed for I have only a few dollars, as I came depending upon meeting him."

"How will you manage?"

"Oh, I will get along all right," Mrs. Richmond replied with a confident air. "I am a daughter of Bohemia and used to looking out for myself."

"And now I have a favor to request of you," she continued. "As soon as I arrive in the town I will call upon Mr. Van Buren and ask him about Mr. Kingsley and while I am thus occupied, will you do all you can to ascertain how it is that Mr. Kingsley gave up the mine and Mr. Van Buren came into possession of it?"

"Certainly, I will be glad to oblige you. The service is a slight one and it will not be any trouble."

This finished the conversation upon this subject and they conversed upon different matters until the camp of Golden Plume came in sight.

CHAPTER III.

AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

As the hack approached the outskirts of the town an idea occurred to the sport.

"I think I will get out before we get into the camp," he observed. "There is always a group of idlers at the hotel, and if they see us get out of the stage in company they will at once jump to the conclusion that we are acquainted, and if you should have any trouble in this quest of yours, and require my assistance, I may be able to do more for you if the people of the town think we are strangers."

"Yes, that is probable, but how shall we arrange to communicate, for you will have to see me to make your report?" Miss Richmond asked.

"Oh, we can arrange that easily enough. I will take a bed at the hotel to-night; there is a sitting-room on the second floor—the ladies' parlor, they call it, and we can see each other there. By to-morrow morning I can learn all the particulars."

"That will do nicely, and I shall be so much obliged to you."

"Don't mention it!" the sport exclaimed, gallantly. "The White Gopher Mine is only about five minutes walk from the hotel, the coach passes it and I will speak to the driver to leave you there."

"If you will be so kind."

"No trouble at all!" the sport declared.

Then he hailed the driver, had the hack stopped and dismounted.

"Say, stranger, I don't bear no malice, you know," Long Hank declared, as Keene closed the door of the carriage and came by the box.

"I am glad of that!" the sport responded in his cheerful way.

"If I had known as much about you before hand as I know now that wouldn't have been no misunderstanding!" the driver remarked.

"Yes, but you see your foresight was not as good as your hindsight, and that it the way it always is in this mighty uncertain world."

"If you won't say nothing 'bout the matter I shall reckon it a favor, for, you see, the boys think that I am a pretty hefty man and they would have the grand laugh on me if it went round that I had picked up a soft thing and got left on it."

"Oh, that is all right! I told you so before," the sharp replied. "I am not setting myself up for a chief, and at any time would rather keep out of a difficulty than get into one; so-long!" and with a wave of his hand the sport departed, but turned ere he had taken three steps and said:

"Oh, by the way, the lady in the hack would like to have you leave her at the White Gopher Mine."

"All right," responded the driver, and then the sport struck off to the right while the hack went on.

During his brief sojourn in the camp Keene had become acquainted with the foreman of a mine situated upon the hillside, to which he was now bound.

The Thunderbolt was the title of the property and the foreman's name was Alex Mackenzie.

He seemed to be a jolly, good-natured fellow, and Keene had looked upon him as a desirable acquaintance, and now his idea in calling upon him was, first to get the information about the White Gopher Mine that Miss Richmond desired, second to see if he could not induce the genial Mackenzie to go into a partnership with him; Mackenzie to find the capital and he the skill. If he had a backer, Keene did not doubt that he could strike a poker game in which he would stand a chance to make some money.

He was too old and experienced a sport to risk cash—in endeavoring to break any of the faro-banks in the camp, being a firm believer in the old saying, "it is not wise to attempt to beat a man at his own game."

To the disappointment of the sport, though, he found that Mackenzie was out of town and was not expected back for a week.

Slowly the sport turned away, a thoughtful look upon his expressive face.

"Luck runs counter," he murmured, as he took his way toward the center of the camp where the Metropolitan Hotel was situated. "Mackenzie is the only man in the town whom I know, and there would not be much chance of getting any stranger to go into a speculation of that kind. If I were to propose such a thing, nine men out of ten would jump to the immediate conclusion that I was trying to get them into a game for the purpose of skinning them."

"Well, as far as I can see, the only thing left for me is to strike some little two-bit ante crowd and sail close to the wind until I get money enough together to get into a respectable game, but it goes against my grain to play with these low-down two-bit gangs, for the men who compose such parties kick like steers if they are touched for a liver. Needs must though when the devil drives!"

By this time the sport had arrived in the main street of the camp, and there he came face to face with a fat, jolly-looking man, although clad in a most miserable way.

His shirt had once been red, but now was a dozen different colors, for it had apparently been patched with whatever cloth came handy.

The pantaloons were of as many hues as the shirt, and his high boots were sadly in need of new soles.

His hat was a broad-brimmed felt with a high crown, which looked as though it had been used as a target for revolver practice, for it was full of holes, through some of which the shaggy hair of the man protruded.

The fat fellow struck an attitude of surprise when he came face-to-face with the sport; he had just emerged from a saloon and was wiping his mouth with the back of his hand when he encountered Keene.

"Kin I believe me eyes?" cried Old Benzine. "Is it you, sweet William, or yer ghost?"

"Oh, I reckon I am flesh and blood!" the sport replied.

"Give us yer paw!" and the other made a dive for Keene's hand, and, having got possession of it, indulged in a hearty shake. "You remember me, the old, original Joe Bowers, Old Benzine as the smart galoots named me up in that delightful Montana camp, Ricaree City, and a healthy burg that was too! I have seen some tough camps in my time, but that town was about the toughest one I ever struck."

"Yes, I think it would puzzle a man to find a harder camp anywhere in the West," the sport replied.

"Now you are shouting!" the veteran bummer exclaimed. "But I say, what are you doing down in this region? I thought you were going into the cattle business in New Mexico?"

"So I did, but being a greenhorn in that line, I failed to make a success of it," Keene replied. "In fact, the speculation was a total failure, and I lost about all the money I possessed, so I was forced to come back to my old business again."

"And how is the wife?"

"Oh, she is well. I have a nice home for her with friends in Santa Fe, and after seeing that she was comfortable, I came down here, having heard that this region was booming, to try if I couldn't carve out a new fortune."

"Ah, yes, I see; well, I am on the same lay myself, trying to pick up what ducats I can," the other observed. "How is luck running?"

"Very badly at present—struck a bad streak, you see, and I am about down to the bed-rock. I am in hopes, though, that things will pick up."

"This camp seems to be a pretty lively place," the veteran observed, with a glance around.

"Yes, I reckon it is. I do not know much about it, for I have only been here a few days, and haven't had time to look around. I was interested in a mining venture, and so did not give any attention to sporting matters."

"And the mining spec didn't pan out well?"

"No, I wasted my time, and a little money; not much, but still more than I could well afford to throw away."

"Well, me noble dook, I would be glad to help you out, but I ain't well fixed myself jest now," the veteran observed. "You see, I hold my money as light as the purse in which I do carry it, and when I make a stake I don't allers hold on to it as I ought to."

"That is the trouble with most men—there is where the egotism of humanity comes in," the sport observed. "When a man is basking in the sunshine, his vanity leads him to think that the sun is bound to shine on him forever, and he neglects to provide for a rainy day."

"Right you are and no mistake!" Joe Bowers exclaimed. "Still, men who kin handle the paste-boards as well as you and I kin, ain't likely to starve if thar is any galoots in the neighborhood with sporting blood in their veins."

"That is true, and I don't doubt that we will be able to get along."

"I have struck a soft snap which will help me," the veteran announced with a grin. "One of the miners whom I run across last night is anxious to be a sport and so I made a contract to teach him all the tricks of the trade in consideration of my bunk and my grub. He's got a comfortable little shanty upon the hillside yonder," and the veteran pointed to the north of the town. "His name is Paddy Kelly, a big, red-headed Irishman, whose fingers are all thumbs, and I reckon from what I have seen of him that if he practices hard he will be able to figure as a sport in about two thousand years."

Keene laughed.

"You are all right then, for your board and lodging for the rest of your natural existence, if he don't back out of the contract," the sport observed.

"Oh, that is all right," Old Benzine replied, confidently. "He will stick to it, I reckon, until I git tired of the job. He kin afford the luxury for he makes good wages; he is in the White Gopher Mine, and they say he is one of the best men in the works."

"Ah, is that so?" the sport remarked. "Well, now this happens to come in lucky. I want to get a little information about that mine for a friend, and this pard of yours will be the very man to give it." And then Keene explained what was wanted.

"Cert! I kin do that as easily as rolling off a log!" Joe Bowers declared.

Then an appointment was made for that night at the Metropolitan Hotel and the two parted.

"Joe Bowers is a shrewd fellow and he will speedily learn all that is known about the matter," Keene observed as he proceeded toward the hotel.

CHAPTER IV.

MISS RICHMOND INQUIRES.

WHEN the hack arrived at the White Gopher Mine it came to a halt, and the driver called to a small boy who was passing, to open the coach door, so the lady could get out, then when she dismounted he drove on.

The reason for this proceeding was, Long Hank knew, that the interview he had with the sport had not improved the looks of his countenance, and he was anxious to keep her from seeing his bruises.

There was a small shanty in front of the mine which bore the sign, "office" on the door, and this door Miss Richmond entered.

The room within was plainly furnished: a small desk, a table and three chairs.

There were two men in the apartment.

One, seated by the table, reading a newspaper, was a blonde-haired, blonde-bearded man of thirty-five or thereabouts, a good-looking and rather portly gentleman, well dressed in a dark business suit, although he wore the dark flannel shirt so common to the region.

This was Elliot Van Buren, the proprietor of the White Gopher Mine.

The other man, who sat at the desk on a high stool, was a tall, muscularly-built fellow with the broad face, light hair and pointed beard of the German.

He was called Herman Gotterang, and was Van Buren's manager.

Both of the men looked surprised when the young lady entered. Mr. Van Buren rose and bowed politely.

"Is this the office of the White Gopher Mine?" Miss Richmond asked.

"It is, miss," Van Buren replied.

Then the lady looked around her in an inquiring way.

"I do not see the gentleman whom I expected to meet," she said, slowly.

The others looked surprised.

"Excuse me, but who did you wish to see?" Van Buren asked.

"The proprietor of the mine."

"I am that person—I own the property," the miner said.

An expression of surprise appeared on Miss Richmond's countenance.

"I do not understand it," she remarked.

"You are not the gentleman I expected to see at all. It is Mr. Kingsley I want."

The two men exchanged glances, and both their faces grew a trifle sober.

"Mr. Kingsley used to be the owner of the mine, but he sold the property to me some time ago," Van Buren explained.

"Oh, yes, I see," and Miss Richmond smiled in her captivating way. "Then Mr. Kingsley is not here any more?"

"No," the mine-owner answered.

"Where will I find him?"

Innocent as was the question, yet it seemed to trouble both of the men, for Van Buren hesitated before he replied, and the German at the desk cast a swift glance, full of suspicion, at the girl.

"Where will you find him?" Van Buren said, slowly.

"Yes, I have come to Golden Plume expressly to see him!" Miss Richmond exclaimed, in a charming outburst of girlish candor.

"Well, really, I don't know as I can answer that question," Van Buren remarked. "Herman, did Mr. Kingsley leave any address when he went away?"

The German appeared to reflect over the matter for a few moments, and then he shook his head.

"No, I don't think that he left any address," he remarked. "If I remember rightly about the matter, he said that he was uncertain where he was going, and it did not matter anyway, for he did not expect any letters."

"And I think he further said he would write when he got settled and let us know, didn't he, Herman?" Van Buren added.

"Yes, I think he did."

"He is not in Golden Plume, then?" and the lady's tone was full of surprise.

"Oh, no," the mine-owner answered.

"And how long has he been away?" Miss Richmond appeared to be full of anxiety as she put the question.

"Well, I should say it was about four months ago, eh, Herman?" Van Buren observed.

"Yes, just about four months," the other replied.

"This is really very distressing!" the lady exclaimed. "I came here on purpose to see Mr. Kingsley and hadn't the least idea that he would not be here when I arrived."

"It certainly is unfortunate," the White Gopher man observed. And then he studied the face of the young girl for a moment.

She stood with her gaze bent on the ground, apparently deep in perplexed and anxious thought.

"Excuse me, are you a relative of Mr. Kingsley's?" Van Buren asked in an insinuating way.

"Oh, dear me! why should you think so?" the young lady exclaimed, apparently very much amazed at the idea.

"Well, I presumed that such might be the

fact from your inquiring, and then it seems to me that you resemble Mr. Kingsley," the gentleman said.

"Well, I am sure you are the first that ever thought of such a thing!" the young lady declared. "My name is Richmond—Adrienne Richmond."

"Ah, yes; well, Miss Richmond I am pleased to make your acquaintance," and Van Buren made a gallant bow; and the lady was prompt to return the salutation, appearing quite confused though, a charming specimen of maidenly innocence.

"And I am sorry that you have been disappointed in not seeing Mr. Kingsley," Van Buren continued. "But after he disposed of the mine to me he left town immediately, and it is my impression that he went East. He got a good price for the mine, and as he was a wealthy man, intended to retire from active business life, I believe."

"It is very unfortunate, for I counted upon seeing him, or else I should not have come to Golden Plume," the lady remarked, slowly.

"Yes, it is disagreeable to be disappointed," the other observed, soothingly. "But as you are a friend of Mr. Kingsley I should be delighted to help you in any way; if you need assistance do not be afraid to say so."

"I am very much obliged, I am sure, but it was Mr. Kingsley I wanted—and if you should happen to hear from him will you send word to me, please, at the hotel?" she said, evidently a little embarrassed.

"The Metropolitan?"

"Yes, I suppose so—I believe that is the name of the hotel; it is the principal one in the town," the lady replied. "That is where Mr. Kingsley lived."

"He boarded at the Metropolitan, and when Jake Bozain, the landlord, finds that you are a friend of Mr. Kingsley you can depend upon his doing all in his power to make you comfortable," Van Buren asserted. "You will find Mrs. Bozain, the landlady, too, to be very agreeable."

"I am glad of that, and you will not forget, please, to let me know if you hear anything from Mr. Kingsley," and Miss Richmond looked toward the door as she spoke.

"Oh, you can rely upon me to send you word immediately!" Van Buren declared. "Do you intend to remain for any length of time in the town?" putting the question in the most insinuating manner.

"I don't know; this unexpected disappointment has completely upset all my plans," the lady declared, an anxious expression upon her handsome face. "I was so confident I should find Mr. Kingsley here that the thought of what I should do if he was absent never entered my head, and I shall have to reflect upon the matter before I can come to any decision. Good-day, gentlemen!"

And then with a graceful inclination of the head, Miss Richmond departed.

Van Buren advanced to the window and watched her until her handsome figure was hid from sight by the house, around the corner of which she turned.

Gotterang drummed in an absent sort of way upon the desk, a peculiar, thoughtful, anxious expression upon his face.

After Miss Richmond disappeared from Van Buren's sight, he returned slowly to his seat by the table an expression upon his face akin to the one upon his companion's countenance.

He sat silent in thought for a few moments, then shook his head in a doubtful way and said:

"Well, Herman, what do you think of this little affair?"

"I do not exactly know what to make of it," the other replied.

"I was considerably astonished when I found out what she wanted."

"Yes, so was I."

"And I fancied that I traced in her face a resemblance to Kingsley."

"Well, I don't know," the German observed, doubtfully. "There is something about her face which seems familiar to me, but I am not sure that she recalls Kingsley to my mind."

"It seems to me, now that I think the matter over, that she acted a little mysteriously too," Van Buren remarked, thoughtfully. "She did not say why she wanted to see Kingsley, or, in fact, anything in regard to her business with him."

"No, that is true."

"It is a very strange affair," Van Buren remarked, musingly. "I never heard Kingsley speak of having any family. In fact, it was my impression that he was an old bachelor, and without a relative in the world."

"Yes, I had that idea also; it seems to me that I once heard him make the remark that he was all alone in the world, and that if he should die there wasn't a soul, attached to him by ties of blood, who would mourn for him."

"Yes, it strikes me that I have heard him speak in that way also. And he hated women too, if you remember."

"Oh, yes, he couldn't bear the sight of them."

"And that made me think he had suffered a love disappointment early in life, and that was

the reason why he was so imbibed against the sex," Van Buren observed.

"Under the circumstances then how strange it is that this young woman should come to the town in quest of him."

"Yes, my first thought was that she was his daughter, and I got that impression because I fancied I saw a resemblance in her face to his but then it seems to me that if he had been a married man, with a daughter as old as this girl, he certainly would have said something about it at some time, although he might not, for he was not given to talking of his life."

"He was close-mouthed," the German remarked. "But if this girl was his daughter it is strange that no letters ever came from her."

"But are you sure that they did not come?" Van Buren asked.

"Yes, certainly!" Gotterang declared, in the most positive way. "I always got the mail, for, if you remember, Kingsley rarely troubled himself to go to the post-office after it."

Van Buren nodded.

"And if any letters had come addressed to him in a woman's hand I should certainly have noticed it."

"Yes, undoubtedly! There is a mystery about this girl, but time may solve it," the mine-owner remarked, thoughtfully.

"I do not like the looks of her at all, and I fear she comes with the idea of making trouble!" Gotterang declared, with a doubtful shake of the head.

"Do you think so?"

"I do, indeed! She seems to be young, innocent and artless, but it is my impression that she is a dangerous woman, and this artless innocence is assumed."

"Well, I don't know about that," Van Buren remarked, slowly. "She did not strike me as being particularly dangerous, excepting that she is a good-looking girl, and her fascinations might be dangerous to an impressionable man and thereby induce him to make a fool of himself," Van Buren remarked, with a light laugh.

The German shook his head.

"I do not think that it is a matter to jest upon!" he exclaimed. "I do not like the looks of the girl and I fear that she will make trouble for us."

"Well, she will have to be a particularly acute and cunning woman to make any disturbance!" Van Buren replied, with scornful accent. "You are certainly over-cautious, my dear Herman, for you scent danger where none can possibly exist."

"I don't know about that," the other remarked, in his grave and earnest way. "It is the unexpected that always happens, you know."

"Oh, but our position is so strong that we can laugh at any attack!" Van Buren declared. "In the first place my title to the mine is perfectly good. The deed bears Kingsley's signature, and there were two witnesses besides the notary public before whom the deed was executed, so that it is all right and regular enough."

"Yes, we are undoubtedly strong, as far as that goes," the other admitted.

"Then, in regard to Kingsley's sudden departure, we had nothing to do with that," Van Buren argued. "The old man was eccentric, had no friends, and was noted for doing strange things."

"What could be more natural than for a man of that kind to depart, after he had disposed of his property, without taking the trouble to say anything to anybody about it?"

"It is true," the German remarked. "It was nothing out of the way for such a man to do such a thing."

"And what grounds has any one to suspect that we had anything to do with his movements?"

The German reflected for a moment.

"You are right; no one can possibly connect us with the affair; but for all that, I would keep an eye on the woman."

Van Buren laughed.

"Ah, there comes in your caution again, but as it will not do any harm to follow your advice, I will certainly do so."

CHAPTER V.

AT THE HOTEL.

AFTER leaving the White Gopher Mine Miss Richmond proceeded straight to the Metropolitan Hotel, which was situated in the center of the town.

Like all the so-called "hotels" in the mining-camp, it was more saloon than hotel.

All the lower part was occupied by a bar-room, and there was an ell at the end of the building, in which the restaurant—which also answered for the dining-room of the hotel—and the cooking department was situated.

But, contrary to the usual custom, there wasn't any gambling saloon connected with the place, usually the greatest money-maker of the wild western hotel.

In lieu of this attraction, however, the enterprising proprietor of the Metropolitan Hotel had constructed a small stage at the rear of the saloon, and screened it with colored cotton cloth in place of scenery, and there at night a variety show was given.

Not much of a one, for it only comprised three

performers, and the music was furnished by a solitary violinist.

There was a small bill-board in front of the hotel, and upon this some amateur artist had painted a description of the attractions that might be seen within.

Miss Richmond paused and read the placard, which ran as follows:

"TO-NIGHT!

BE SURE TO TAKE IT IN!

FREE ADMISSION!

THE RENOWNED SERIO-COMIC

LILLY DAVENPORT!

THE CHAMPION BANJOIST,

BILLY SKIDDER!

THE FAVORITE SON OF MOMUS,

ANDY WILLIAMS!"

She perused it intently from beginning to end, a peculiar expression upon her face, and then she entered the hotel.

Long Hank had warned the landlord that he might expect to see the most "bang-up lady that ever struck Golden Plume!" to quote the driver's words, so he was on the lookout, and when Miss Richmond entered the side door, from which the stairs led to the second story, Mr. Bozain, who was a middle-aged, fat man, with a good-natured, jovial face, was on hand to greet her.

"How do you do, miss? I'm glad to see you!" he exclaimed. "The driver told me you were coming, and would probably want to stop here, and so my wife has got a room all ready for you."

"You are very kind indeed," the lady remarked.

"Oh, that is all right; though Mrs. Bozain and I are running a hotel at the jumping-off place of civilization, as you might say, yet I reckon you will find that we know how to take care of any kind of folks who may come along," and as he spoke the landlord led the way up-stairs to the parlor, where his wife was waiting to receive the new-comer.

Mrs. Bozain was just as fat and jolly as her husband, and she received Miss Richmond as warmly as though she was the nearest and dearest friend she had in the world.

"Take off your things—sit right down and make yourself at home!" the good lady exclaimed, bustling around the girl and assisting her to remove her outer garments. "How may I call your name, miss?"

"Richmond, Adrienne Richmond," the young lady replied, as she accepted the chair that the landlord brought. "I was quite disappointed on calling at the White Gopher Mine to find that Mr. Kingsley had left town."

"Yes, yes, Long Hank—that is the driver of the hack—said as how he had left you at the mine," the landlord remarked. "And did you come to the camp on purpose to see Mr. Kingsley?"

"Yes, if I had not believed that he was here, I should not have come."

"Bless me! Mr. Kingsley has been gone for five or six months, hain't he, Jake?" the landlady exclaimed.

"Somewhere around that time," the host replied. "Wife and I knew Mr. Kingsley well, for he used to board here."

"So they told me at the mine. Did Mr. Kingsley say where he was going when he went away?" the girl inquired.

"No, he never said a word," the landlord replied. "Jest paid his bill on Saturday night and went out, and that was the last we ever saw of him."

"Why, it seems to me that he acted very strangely!" the girl declared. "When he did not come back I should think you would have fancied that there was something wrong about the matter."

"Oh, no, he was in the habit of going off in that way without saying anything to anybody, and seeing that he was a kinder odd man, nobody thought nothing about it," the host remarked.

"You see he was one of the kind of men who did not like people to meddle with his affairs," the landlady explained. "And if we had troubled ourselves about his absence, and he had come back, he would have been apt to be angry at our interference."

"Yes, I understand," Miss Richmond said, thoughtfully.

"And then in a camp like this, miss, you see, it is different from a town in the East," the landlord explained. "Here everybody has so much business of their own to attend to that they hain't got no time to bother themselves 'bout what their neighbors do. If we hadn't heered anything from Mr. Kingsley I s'pose we would have wondered some, but on Monday we got a note from him requesting us to send his trunk over to White Oaks by the first stage as he wasn't coming back to Golden Plume, and right on top of that came the news that he had sold the White Gopher Mine to Mr. Van Buren."

"That explained his departure," the girl observed.

"Yes; we are all on us here in this 'ere town to make our pile, and when a man gets what he thinks is enough, you kin jest bet that he is going to clear out as soon as he kin," Mr. Bozain remarked, with the air of a philosopher.

"Oh, yes, I should not think any one would care to stay here if they had plenty of money to go and enjoy life elsewhere," Miss Richmond said. "You sent the trunk, I suppose," she added, carelessly, not as if she took any interest in the matter, but just as if she spoke for the sake of saying something.

"Yes, by the next stage, and I was glad of the chance to do something for Mr. Kingsley, for he was a mighty fine man, although he was a leetle odd in his ways," the landlord replied.

"But how was it that he went on Saturday night?" Miss Richmond questioned, as though the fact struck her as being strange. "I did not know the stage went at night."

"It don't," Mr. Bozain replied. "It run then just the same as it does now, on Tuesday."

"Oh, then he did not go by the stage?" the young lady said.

"No, he had his own hoss, you know, and he jest mounted the animal on that Saturday night, and lit out without saying a word to any one," the host explained.

"Wasn't that rather strange?"

"Well, no, I reckon that Mr. Kingsley had a mighty good reason for it," Mr. Bozain observed, with a knowing shake of the head.

"You see he was an awful, mighty sharp old gentleman, and the man who got the best of him had to git up very early in the morning. On that Saturday he sold his mine to Mr. Van Buren, and got a mighty big sum in cash for it, right down on the nail, and I s'pose he reckoned that as the news of the trade would git all over town before the stage left on Tuesday, some galoots might take it into their heads to try a little road-agent business, and waylay the stage."

"Ah, yes, I see!" Miss Richmond exclaimed.

"So he jest stole a march on them and scooted out of the camp afore any of the boys got wind of the trade!" said the landlord with a chuckle, which showed that he considered the move to be an extremely smart one.

"And Mr. Kingsley waited in White Oaks until his trunk came, I suppose, and then went on his way?" the girl observed.

"Yes, I reckon so, or he might have gone right on and left word for his trunk to be forwarded," the host replied. "I don't know anything 'bout that, for I never heered a word of the man arter he left this camp."

"And it is such a shame, too, to think that you came all the way to Golden Plume to see Mr. Kingsley, and then to find him gone!" the landlady exclaimed at this point. "I don't remember to have ever heard of anything more disappointing!"

"Yes, I am sadly put out," Miss Richmond replied, slowly.

"Was Mr. Kingsley a relation of yours?" the hostess inquired with all a woman's curiosity. "It pears to me that you look a sight like him."

"Why, I never heard any one say that before!" the girl exclaimed, as if surprised by the statement.

"Well, I think it is so, don't you, Jake?" Mrs. Bozain asked.

Then the host carefully studied the countenance of the young girl for a few moments.

"Yes, I sart'ly think there is a strong likeness," he responded with owl-like gravity.

"It is quite odd, I am sure, but as I never saw Mr. Kingsley, I cannot say whether you are correct in your belief or not," Miss Richmond observed. "I suppose that it is possible, though, for people who are not connected by ties of blood often look like each other."

"It is a sad disappointment to me to find Mr. Kingsley has gone for good, for I came with the intention of making my home with him," she added.

"Is that so?" the landlord exclaimed, full of interest.

"Yes, he used to take a deep interest in my family, and about six months ago I got a letter from him telling me that he had settled in this place and inviting me to make my future home with him, if I felt disposed to put up with an old man's whims. He knew that I was all alone in the world, without any one to look after me," the young lady explained.

"Six months ago, hey?" the landlord exclaimed. "Well, I reckon that at that time he had no notion of selling the mine."

"No, I think not; for he wrote as though he intended to spend the rest of his days in this place," Miss Richmond observed. "By an unfortunate chain of circumstances the letter did not reach me until a month ago. I was in England, traveling with some friends, and by a blunder on the part of the person who got the letter in my absence, it was not forwarded to me, but kept in America until I returned."

"Well, now, that was a blunder!" Mr. Bozain declared.

"Yes, and as soon as I received the letter I made up my mind to answer it in person and so I set out for Golden Plume, and that is where I made a mistake, for I ought to have waited until I had written to Mr. Kingsley and re-

ceived a letter from him, but youth is always rash, you know," Miss Richmond remarked with one of her charming smiles.

"I'm sure your coming was very natural indeed!" the landlady declared. "Most everybody would have done the same."

"Yes, but I am placed in a very embarrassing position," the young lady remarked. "I came in such haste that I did not incumber myself with a trunk, only packed up a few things in a hand sachel, and the result is that I find myself here alone and friendless in a strange place with very little money in my pocket indeed."

CHAPTER VI.

A NOVEL IDEA.

"Now, say, don't let that trouble you a bit!" the landlord hastened to exclaim. "And don't you talk 'bout being in a strange town, alone and friendless, as long as Mrs. Bozain and a man about my size are in the land of the living!"

"Yes, don't you worry, dear!" the hostess cried, "cos we will make you comfortable."

"Never mind 'bout the money!" Mr. Bozain declared with a lordly wave of his fat hand. "You kin stay here, all right, money or no money, until you kin write to your friends and tell them jest how you are situated."

"Oh, you are so kind," Miss Richmond replied, a grateful look upon her fair face.

"Not a bit of it! We are only a-living up to the golden rule, do as you would be done by!" the landlord declared with a flourish.

"Yes, deary, we have got a darter, married and a-settled 'way off, and I reckon my old man here is only a-treating you as he would like our Jane to be treated if she should git into a trouble like this," Mrs. Bozain remarked.

"I am so thankful to you," the young lady remarked in the sweetest tones. "But I am so badly situated that even your kind offer does not improve my position much. You see, my friends are all in the East; they are not very well off, any of them, and you know it costs a small fortune to get from here to New York, so I don't really believe there is one of the number who would be able to send me money enough to pay my fare, even if they were quite willing to do so."

"I reckon you are 'bout right," the landlord observed in a reflective way. "It does cost a heap of money to git to the East, and it is axing a good deal of a friend to call on him to put up so much cash."

"Now if I could only get something to do here," Miss Richmond suggested. "Some work which would pay me enough to enable me to live and save a little each week and then, when I got enough, I could go away without feeling that I had incurred a debt of gratitude which I may never be able to pay."

"I declare to goodness, Jake, if Miss Richmond ain't talking good, sound sense now!" the landlady declared. "She is jest right now, and don't you forget it."

"I believe that is so," Mr. Bozain observed, in a reflective way. "But I will be jiggered if I know what there is in this hyer camp that she would be able to work at. There is plenty of work for men—good, strong, able-bodied fellows, who kin do hard work—but I am blessed if I kin think of anything for a gal to do."

"I saw a show-bill as I came in," the young lady observed in a timid way.

"Yes, we give a variety show in the saloon down-stairs every night. You see, my wife here is opposed to my running any gambling games in the saloon—she allers belonged to the church at home, you know—and as I had to have something to rope the boys in at night, I started the show, and it works fu'st rate. I git jest as many people in as the other saloons that run gambling as an attraction."

"Well, I was thinking that perhaps there might be some chance for me to earn something in that line," the girl remarked. "I have sung a great deal, and people have always complimented me upon my voice, and I think if you would give me a chance I would be able to give satisfaction."

The landlord was greatly surprised by this speech, and he looked in a puzzled way at his wife.

The woman's wits were by far the quickest.

"Well, I don't see why she should not be able to do something in that way, Jake," she declared.

"You are a good-looking girl, and any one with half an eye can see that you are a lady!" she added. "Then you have a real nice speaking voice, and if you can sing any here near as well as you can talk, I am sure the boys will like you; don't you think so, Jake?"

"Well, I dunno; it is kinder risky," the landlord replied, with a dubious shake of the head.

"You see, miss, it looks like an easy thing jest to come out on a platform and sing a song or two, but when you come to the scratch you will find that it is a hard job, and then, though I have one of the best fighting men in the camp who comes every night expressly to preserve order, yet the boys are kinder rough once in a while, and if the performer ain't up to the mark they are mighty apt to poke

a lot of fun at the party, kinder guy the show, you know, as these actors call it, and you can't put a dozen men out, bounce 'em, jest for telling the performer that he's no good, and that he would make more money by taking a shoe-maker's job, and things of that kind."

Miss Richmond laughed merrily, by which it could be plainly seen the host's description of the audience had struck no terror to her soul.

"The remarks are certainly candid if they are not complimentary!" she declared. "But I am not at all afraid of the ordeal. You miners are only men, and although they may be a little rough yet they are honest and I feel sure I will receive fair treatment from them."

"I'll bet that she will get along all right!" the hostess declared, impressed by the confidence of the girl.

"Oh, I am willing for you to try it if you feel like running the risk," the landlord remarked.

"It will not be my first appearance, for I have sung in public," Miss Richmond remarked. "So you need not fear that I shall be frightened when I appear before the audience."

"Oh, that makes a difference!" Mr. Bozain declared. "If you have faced a crowd once, why you kin do it ag'in; and, mebbe, you will do furst rate. Nobody kin tell anything about that until the thing is tried on, you know, and the better you please the boys the more money you will git."

"You see the way I fix the thing is arter this fashion," the landlord continued. "I don't pay no wages but I give all the performers their board, and then when they git through their turn on the stage the hat is passed around and the boys give whatever they choose."

"Yes, I understand," Miss Richmond observed. "The more popular a performer is the more money they get."

"That is the way of it, and if the performer don't take, then the boys won't shell out," Bozain explained. "Nobody is obliged to give anything, you know, for it is a free show, but if the performer is good for anything at all it is a mighty poor night when the hat don't pan out a dollar or two. We don't use no coin less than a quarter here, and it only takes four men at a quarter apiece to make a dollar, and we generally have twenty-five or thirty in to see the show and on Saturday nights fifty to sixty."

"I think the performer stands a very good chance indeed," Miss Richmond declared. "And I am quite willing to try my luck."

"Will you put her on to-night, Jake?" the landlady asked, taking a great interest in the affair.

"No, I reckon she had better wait until to-morrow night," the host replied, after thinking over the matter a moment. "That will give me time to advertise her. We ought to work the trick so as to git all the boys in the camp in to see her the first night, 'cos we don't git a new performer more'n once a month. But I say, it would be an awful bad break if you should happen to git frightened and make a failure."

Mr. Bozain evidently had doubts.

"I am not at all afraid!" the young lady declared, with the utmost confidence. "These miners may be rough, but I am sure they will not be any harder to please than the audiences I have faced before, and as I always got through all right I have no fears now."

"I am sure she will please 'em, Jake!" Mrs. Bozain exclaimed.

"All right, I will let you go ahead," the landlord announced. "One thing is sartain, and that is if you do make a go of it you will be pretty sure to pick up from ten to twenty dollars the first week, 'cos the boys are all flush now, and if they like you they will be apt to plank down their two-bit pieces in a pretty lively manner."

"Well, I will do my best to please them," the young lady remarked.

"And you'll do it, too!" Mrs. Bozain declared. "Jest you waltz out on that air platform with the idee that you are the best singer that ever struck this camp, and if you can sing one-half as nicely as you speak you'll ketch the crowd for all they are worth!"

The landlord had been surveying Miss Richmond's costume with a speculative eye.

"I s'pose you hain't got no stage dress?" he said.

"No, of course I did not expect to have to do anything of this kind and made no preparations for it," the young lady replied.

"It is a pity, for a gorgeous dress is half the battle," Bozain remarked. "If you could come in on a stunning blue or yaller silk with laces and fringe and buttons and all sorts of jimcracks upon it so as to paralyze the gang before you open your mouth, it would help you out amazingly!"

Miss Richmond laughed, and shook her head.

"I am afraid I will have to do the best I can as I am."

"Mebbe Lily Davenport will help her out," the landlady suggested.

"Well, I don't know 'bout that," the husband replied. "Lily is a jealous kind of a cat, anyway, and she may take the notion into her head that Miss Richmond's coming will interfere with her, although she told me this morning that I

ought to get more performers, 'cos I hadn't enough to give a good show and she wasn't going to do more than three turns a night after this. She's been doing four turns, two songs to each turn, eight in a night, and she said it was too much and she wouldn't sing more than six hereafter."

"My goodness! I should think six was quite enough," the young lady declared.

"Well, I calculate to give 'bout an hour and a half show; we commence 'bout nine and wind up close to eleven."

"Near two hours, Jake, generally!" the wife declared.

"They have been running a little longer lately on account of Williams and Skidder doing some nigger acts."

"But I say, wife, Lily's dresses wouldn't fit Miss Richmond even if she was willing to lend them, for she is stouter than this young lady and not near so tall."

"Oh, they could be altered. What do you men know about such things?" Mrs. Bozain exclaimed.

"Nothing, of course, but I will go you a big doughnut that you don't work the trick!" the landlord declared.

"I think I would prefer to go on as I am," Miss Richmond said. "I would not like to place myself under obligations to a stranger."

"I reckon Miss Richmond is right, Jake," the landlady remarked. "And Lily Davenport, too, is one of the kind of woman that you never know how to take. One moment she is so nice and pleasant that you wouldn't think butter would melt in her mouth, and the next she is a regular spit-fire."

"Well, my dear, you must remember she has had a deal of trouble," Mr. Bozain observed. "But show Miss Richmond to her room, and I will go ahead to advertise her appearance."

So while Bozain descended the stairs the landlady conducted the young lady to a small apartment, situated next door to the parlor, and there left her to her own meditations, which were far from being pleasant ones.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SERIO-COMIC.

MISS RICHMOND sat down by the single window that illuminated the room.

The apartment was on the side of the hotel, the parlor occupying the front, but as there was a large vacant space between the hotel and the next building, which was a one-storied store, the young lady was able to get a view of the main street.

Deep in meditation, and with dark lines of care wrinkled upon her white forehead, the girl rested her chin in her hand and gazed listlessly out of the window.

Though her eyes were fixed upon the scene without, yet it was evident that her mind was far away.

She was roused from her meditation by the landlord with her sachel, and when she answered his knock at the door, as if by magic all traces of care had vanished from her face and her countenance was wreathed in smiles.

It was plain that she was a most excellent actress, and possessed a perfect command over her features.

She took the boy, thanked the host for his kindness, and then, when he departed, returned to her seat, and again the mask dropped from her features and the old careworn look returned; with this expression on her face she looked fully ten years older.

For fully twenty minutes she gazed out upon the street, her chin resting in her hand, her eyes fixed, but no word escaped her lips, nor was she conscious of anything that took place in the street.

Men were passing up and down, but she saw them not.

She was like a seeress, trying to see into the future.

From her observation she was roused by a knock on her door.

With an expression of annoyance she called out:

"Come!"

But by the time the door opened, her countenance changed, and she wore the mask of cheerfulness again.

The door opened to give entrance to a woman, a showy-looking girl of twenty-two or thereabouts, although there were hard lines upon her face, due to sad experience, which made her look older than she really was.

The new-comer was a blonde, with rather light hair, which suggested that it owed its peculiar hue to the bleacher's art, and gray-blue eyes, with a glint of fire in them, apparently showing that the owner had considerable temper. She was rather short and stout, still with a fine figure; and, take her for all in all, she would be considered to be a fine-looking girl in any society.

Miss Richmond guessed at once that this was Lily Davenport, and so she rose to greet her with a pleasant smile.

The new-comer closed the door after her, advanced half-way across the room, halted, and surveyed Adrienne with a piercing look, as though she would read her very soul.

"You are Miss Richmond, I suppose?" she exclaimed, after she had apparently satisfied her curiosity in regard to the looks of the other.

The young woman spoke with a deep and rather musical voice, but the well-trained ears of the young lady detected immediately that the voice was deteriorating, and was not now what it once had been.

The girl had evidently been careless of the gift which Nature had bestowed upon her, for the voice must be taken as much care of as a costly musical instrument, which will not bear rough usage or neglect.

"Yes, that is my name, and you are Miss Davenport, I suppose," the young girl remarked with her charming, artless smile.

"Not Miss Davenport—Lily Davenport, for I am a married woman, worse luck!" the other replied.

"Excuse me! I did not know, of course," Miss Richmond protested, evidently embarrassed by her mistake.

"Oh, that is all right! You need not make a face about it as though you had swallowed a little dose of medicine!" the other exclaimed. "Miss Bozain told me about you so I thought I would come and see what you were like."

"You are very kind!" Miss Richmond said, sweetly.

Lily Davenport cast one of her piercing glances at the girl, and then a contemptuous expression appeared on her face.

"Oh, humbug!" she exclaimed. "You are too soft entirely! but as I am an old stager and used to such games you cannot fool me!"

"Really I have no intention of doing anything of the kind!" the other protested in a reproachful way.

"Oh, no, of course not!" Lily Davenport exclaimed in an extremely sarcastic manner.

"Well, I will take a seat on the bed as there doesn't seem to be another chair in the room, and the lady suited the action to the word."

"Take this chair, please!" Miss Richmond exclaimed, hastening to proffer it.

"Oh, keep it yourself! I am very comfortable here, thank you. Sit down now so I can have a talk with you."

The other obeyed the command with the docility of a well-trained child.

Lily Davenport favored her with another long and earnest look.

"So your name is Adrienne Richmond?" she said at last.

"Yes," Miss Richmond responded, smiling in her winning way.

"It is a pretty name."

"I am glad you like it."

"It is too pretty to be real, though," the other declared, with a sneer.

Miss Richmond laughed as though she thought that this was a joke.

"You do not seem to be offended by my rather brutal frankness!" Lily Davenport exclaimed, evidently astonished.

"Why should I be offended?" the girl demanded. "I do not see anything in your remark to give me offense. If you do not believe that it is my real name because it happens to be a pretty one, that is no reason why I should feel hurt. Every one ought to be entitled to their opinion, and free to express it, it seems to me."

"You are either an extremely sweet-tempered young lady, or else you are as clever an actress as I have ever met!"

"In either case I suppose I will have to thank you for a compliment," Miss Richmond retorted, with a polite inclination of her shapely head.

Lily Davenport knitted her thick brows together.

"Oh, you are certainly a very sweet creature, indeed!" she cried, but evidently in sarcasm.

"Well, I do not know about that, but I always try to be agreeable to everybody whom I chance to meet," Miss Richmond replied, nothing in her manner indicating that she had given the other a truly feminine dig.

"Oh!" the other exclaimed, "that was very nicely put, and you said it in such an innocent way, too, just as if you were not conscious that you had managed to give me a strong hint that I had not behaved myself as well as I ought to. I can see that you are amply able to take care of yourself."

"Well, I don't know about that. I try to, of course," the other said in a doubtful way.

"What is this that Bozain has been telling me upon your going on in the olio?" Lily Davenport demanded, abruptly.

"About my singing in the show?"

"Yes; don't you know what the olio means?"

"Well, I suppose you mean the performance."

"You are a nice, innocent little duck to try such a life as that!" the other exclaimed, contemptuously. "That is if you are one-half as green as you try to make yourself out to be."

"Well, I don't know. I am obliged to do something," Miss Richmond responded in a doubtful way. "I am here all alone, without a friend upon whom I can call for aid, and with very little money indeed. I must get money in some way so I can get away, and as I have no friends to whom I can write for assistance I am compelled to depend upon myself. I would be glad to get something else to do, of course,

but the landlord could not tell me of anything, and so I am obliged to try what I can do on the stage."

"Why don't you pick up a husband?" Lily Davenport demanded, bluntly. "In a camp like this there are always plenty of men with money who would be glad of the chance to pick up a pretty doll-like girl of your kind!"

Adrienne laughed merrily as though she thought the suggestion was a very good joke indeed.

"Oh, no, I am not anxious to get married yet awhile!" she exclaimed. "I am too fond of my freedom to sell it, unless indeed I got a man with a couple of millions, so that my chains would be a golden one."

"Your head is certainly level there!" the other declared with an approving nod. "I was foolish enough to fall in love and get married, and I have repented my folly in sackcloth and ashes almost ever since."

"You speak bitterly," Miss Richmond remarked in her mild and gentle way.

"I have ample reason for it!" Lily Davenport declared. "My story is the old one, and it is no secret here in the camp, for there are a lot of men here who know all about me, men who knew me when I sung in the towns on the Santa Fe road. You see I have been a vocalist ever since I was a child. I am a good singer, understood my business thoroughly, and got as good a salary as any serio-comic in the business. You know what a serio-comic is, I suppose?"

"Yes, I think so," Adrienne replied, hesitatingly. "It is a lady who sings both serious ballads and lively comic songs."

"That is it. I sing everything from the Last Rose of Summer down to the Mulligan Guards, but in a camp like this the men don't want any of the Last Rose of Summer in theirs. All they care for is lively songs with plenty of fun."

"Yes, I suppose so, although I don't know anything about it," Miss Richmond remarked, in her innocent way.

"Oh, I am giving you a straight tip," the other declared. "I could see from the way that Bozain spoke that he had an idea that I would be jealous of you, but I am not. Even the narrow world of this little camp is plenty big enough for both of us."

"I am glad of that," Miss Richmond declared. "I should be unhappy if I thought that my attempt to gain a little money by the only means which seems open to me would result in making any one my enemy."

"Oh, that is all right, we will not quarrel," Lily Davenport asserted. "I have not a doubt but what there will be plenty of two-bit pieces for both of us; and if you have nerve enough to get through your songs I shouldn't be surprised if the miners take quite a fancy to you—that is, if you can act as well on the stage as you can off."

"What an idea!" Adrienne exclaimed, as if she did not know what to make of the speech.

"Oh, yes, I am considerably disappointed in you."

"Is that possible?"

"True as preaching! You are not the kind of girl that I expected to see at all. You succeeded in pulling the wool over the landlord's eyes, and even Mrs. Bozain doesn't seem to suspect, but I am a woman who has seen a good deal more of life than has the landlady, although she is old enough to be my mother, and I can see that you are not anywhere near as simple and innocent as you try to make out."

"I am sure I have never pretended to be aught but what I am," Miss Richmond declared, simply.

"No, I don't suppose that you do say much in words, but by your actions you imply a great deal. Oh, you are a deep one!"

Miss Richmond laughed.

"If you have such a belief I do not suppose that it will be any use for me to try and argue you out of it," she said, smiling as sweetly as though she thought she had been complimented.

"And this story of yours of coming here to see Mr. Kingsley—do you know it seems to me to be a little thin, to resort to slang?"

"Now, Mrs. Davenport, if it is not the truth, and I have come here for some other purpose, it is plain that if I am the deep and designing creature you take me to be, I will not be apt to betray my secret to the first comer upon the asking."

"I am well answered," was the other's comment. "And whether you are simple or deep, it is evident that you have brains enough to enable you to take care of yourself, which is more than I can say for a lady who is known as Lily Davenport."

"Oh, Mrs. Davenport, you wrong yourself, I am sure!" the other declared.

"No, I don't! I know what I am talking about, and you do not. I cannot believe that any man could fool you into such a wretched marriage as I made!"

"I don't know; I am not acquainted with the circumstances."

"Well, Ned Davenport, my husband, made my acquaintance in Denver. He was then on his way to this camp. That was about a year ago. He was a good-looking fellow, apparently had plenty of money, and laid siege to me in the

most earnest manner. He made quick work of it, too, for in a week after we became acquainted we were married."

"Oh, I don't think I should have been in such a hurry as that!" Miss Richmond declared, with a shake of the head.

"I do not doubt it! Simple and innocent as you appear to be, yet you would have had more sense, but I lost my head. I became infatuated with the fellow, and then he dazzled me with his stories of how happy we would be, and the life of luxury he would give me, the glittering liar!" the woman cried, with bitter accent.

"He gave me to understand that he was a partner in the White Gopher Mine, when he was only the bookkeeper and treasurer."

Mrs. Davenport was so occupied with her story—so incensed as she reflected upon the past, that she failed to notice the glint of fire which came in the eyes of Miss Richmond when she spoke of the White Gopher property.

It was but a momentary flash of light, and then the eyes were as sweetly unexpressive as ever."

"I believed every word the fellow said, married him and came to this town, but before I had been here a month my eyes were opened as to the true character of the man whom I had married," Mrs. Davenport continued. "At heart my husband was a rascal, and if he did not stoop to crime it was because he was a thorough coward and feared the consequences; he was not honest because he believed in honesty, but because he was afraid of being caught."

"And then in addition he was a drunkard, one of the kind who stole off and took his liquor all alone by himself. He had the decency to try and hide from me just how bad he was doing the first of our married life, but, little by little, the mask dropped, and before our honeymoon was over I understood that I was wedded to a man who was a complete slave to liquor. There was not a night in the week that he went to bed sober!"

"But if that was the case, how was he able to attend to his duties at the mine?" Miss Richmond asked, evidently taking a great interest in the recital.

"He did not attend to them as he should have done, though he was careful not to drink much until his work was done," Mrs. Davenport replied. "Twice though he got on sprees and was discharged by Mr. Kingsley, and I went and begged him back. He had two strong friends in the mine, too, Mr. Van Buren and the German, Gotterang. How in the world my husband succeeded in deceiving them, I do not know, but they believed him to be an excellent man, only easily led away, as Mr. Van Buren himself told me."

"The two helped me to get my husband taken back, and after this second scrape he was careful not to drink in the daytime so that he could not attend to his business."

"I suppose of course that the gentlemen felt sorry for him as they presumed he was a good worker," the other observed.

"Yes, he was an excellent bookkeeper, and one of the most expert penmen in the West; his writing was absolutely faultless and there was hardly anything which could be executed by the pen which he could not do."

"I do not wonder then that they interceded for him."

"It proved to be an unfortunate affair for me, for after the occurrence my husband began to treat me badly, and as I have a temper of my own we quarreled; then, in a rage, I went away—went back to the stage again, as many a woman who has been in public life and retired on account of marrying has been obliged to do, but in my case I did not go back to support my husband. That is something I would not do."

"I do not blame you, I should think that would be dreadful!" Miss Richmond declared.

"About a month ago I came to White Oaks. My husband heard that I was there and he came to see me. I had neither seen nor heard from him since I went away."

"He wanted me to come back; told me all about Mr. Kingsley selling the mine and said Van Buren had promised to give him an interest in the property, provided he kept straight and attended to business, and he begged me to come back to him."

"He promised to behave himself in the future, of course," Adrienne said with one of her cheerful smiles.

"Oh, yes, he was ready to promise anything under the sun, but such promises are like pie-crust only made to be broken!" Mrs. Davenport exclaimed, scornfully.

"I did not believe that he had reformed, but I came back, for I thought I ought to give him another trial; but it was just as I expected though. He was worse if anything than when I went away. I staid with him just two weeks, he has a little cabin on the hillside near the works, and then we had words one night when he came home in a most disgusting state, and I came down to the hotel the next day and arranged to go on in the next olio, and I have been here ever since."

"What a distressing story!"

"Yes, my husband comes to see me once in a while and tries to persuade me that he is going

to turn over a new leaf, but I know just how much faith can be put in his promises now. He is beyond redemption, and I can plainly see that he is going all to pieces."

"In fact, I met Mr. Van Buren yesterday and he told me that my husband has not done five days' work in the last two weeks, and he was afraid from the way he was going on that he would not last long, and he spoke as if he was really sorry for him; said his drunkenness was really a disease, and he could no more help it than a man could help having a cold or fever, and I must not worry about him, for he and Mr. Gotterang had made up their minds to see him through and they would look out that he should not want for anything."

"How good!" Miss Richmond exclaimed, opening her big eyes to their fullest extent.

"Yes, I suppose I ought to be very thankful, but I will be honest with you and say that I am not!" Mrs. Davenport declared, with a somber face.

"The unfortunate wretch is dying by inches, I know, but I cannot find it in my heart to be sorry for him. I cannot forget that he has wrecked all my life, and though he may succeed in deceiving Mr. Van Buren and Gotterang, smart as they think themselves, yet he cannot deceive me. I know that he is a base, unprincipled rascal, and if he has not committed any crime it is because he is too big a coward to risk the consequences."

"I do not doubt that you are right," Miss Richmond declared. "I would sooner trust the judgment of a woman like yourself on a subject of this kind than all the men in creation!"

Mrs. Davenport's face was firm and hard, but it relaxed a little as she listened to the girl's assurance.

"Now see what an idiot I am!" she exclaimed.

"Here I have made a confidante of you, an utter stranger, and I will tell you frankly that you are not the kind of woman I would want to trust with a secret if I had stopped to consider the matter, but I did not; I babbled away like a foolish child or a loose-tongued old woman."

"Why would you not have trusted me?" Miss Richmond exclaimed, in accents of amazement.

"Because my womanly instinct tells me that your appearance is not to be relied upon," Mrs. Davenport declared. "You look to be a simple, innocent girl, but I suspect you are a case of 'still waters run deep.' I feel sure you are wise, skillful and determined, and that any one who makes an enemy of you will need to keep their wits about them."

Miss Richmond laughed in her merry, light-hearted way.

"Upon my word, if you keep on you will make me out to be a perfect paragon of a woman!" she exclaimed.

"But I can understand how it is that you came to tell me your story. You wanted to confide in somebody, and in some mysterious way the impulse came to you to tell me the sad tale. It was very natural indeed. It is human nature and it has always been so since the world began. Don't you remember the story of King Midas who reigned away back in the fabulous ages?"

"No, I must admit that my education is none of the best."

"Well, this king was one of the mightiest on earth, the king of all kings, but although a very handsome man he had a pair of ass's ears instead of a human's. This fact, by a dextrous arrangement of crowns and caps had always been concealed from the world, so that no one suspected the truth. There came a time though when the king was obliged to allow the slave who waited upon him to know how he was afflicted. The man understood that to dare reveal the secret to the world would surely cause him to be put to death, but the secret was too big to be contained in his own breast, so as he did not dare to tell it to any human he went down to the water's edge and whispered to the nodding reeds, 'King Midas has ass's ears!' so he relieved his mind. Then up came a storm, the winds blew and from each particular reed came the cry 'King Midas has ass's ears!' and so the secret was published to the world."

"You see, even the reeds couldn't hold their tongues!" and Miss Richmond laughed in her silvery way.

"There is a deal of truth in the story," Mrs. Davenport remarked, reflectively. "In this world it is not possible sometimes for people to keep still even when it is most important that they should."

"But enough of this doleful subject!" she exclaimed abruptly. "Let us get down to business. Mrs. Bozain asked me if I would not be kind enough to see what I could do toward fixing you up some sort of a dress, and that is what I came about."

"You are very kind indeed!"

"But come into my room and we will see what can be done."

"With pleasure!" Miss Richmond responded. Lily Davenport then conducted the girl to her apartment which was in the back of the house.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CONSULTATION.

The apartment of the serio-comic was on the other side of the entry from the room occupied

by Miss Richmond, but it was the same size and exactly like the other in all respects.

As it cost a small fortune to freight goods to this lonely camp, not a piece of furniture was provided that could possibly be done without.

The only articles in Mrs. Davenport's room which were not duplicated in the other, were the little pictures with which she had adorned the bare walls, and the good-sized trunk which stood in one corner.

"What a difference the pictures make in the appearance of the room!" Miss Richmond exclaimed, after taking a good look around.

"Yes, and they are only little common things, chromos which I have picked up here and there in my wanderings," the other replied. "As you perceive, I have never been able to afford the luxury of frames, not on account of the expense, but because they would take up too much room in my trunk."

"Yes, I suppose it would be difficult to carry them around."

"Now then, we will see what we can do for a dress for you," and Mrs. Davenport unlocked the trunk, took out the tray, and proceeded to unpack.

Suddenly she paused.

"Oh, by the way, what are you going to sing?" she asked. "I forgot to speak about that, and yet it is necessary for me to know in order to pick out a suitable dress."

"Well, I really don't know; I haven't thought about that yet," Miss Richmond replied, evidently puzzled by the question.

"That is the first thing to be settled, you know. If you are going to sing sentimental ballads of the 'Home, Sweet Home,' style, you ought to wear an evening dress with a train, but if you are going to do a regular serio-comic tune, give them 'Kerrigan's Masquerade,' and pieces of that stamp, then you want a short dress like this," and the speaker held up a gaudy silk dress, elaborately trimmed with gold lace, the skirt of which only came a little way below the knee.

"Oh, I don't think I would like to wear a dress so short as that," Miss Richmond said, her modesty evidently shocked by the shortness of the skirt.

"Now if you are going into this business with the idea of getting a living out of it you must get such nonsense as that out of your head!" the other declared.

"This dress is not half as bad as the ones that high-toned fashionable ladies wear to masquerade balls, and I have never seen any performers on the stage quite so bold in exhibiting themselves as some so-called society ladies at one of the swell balls that I attended in San Francisco once."

"Oh, I suppose that is all in getting used to it," the young lady remarked, thoughtfully. "It is like bathing in cold water; you hesitate about taking the first plunge, but when that is done, there is no more trouble."

"Yes, that is about the idea. This dress is my favorite. I have six different ones, pretty much alike in pattern, so as to be able to wear a different one every night in the week."

"Now, here is one which I think will suit you," she continued, and she spread a magenta silk dress, trimmed with black lace and jet bugles, upon the bed.

"Oh, isn't it pretty?" Miss Richmond exclaimed.

"Yes, and I think it will about fit you as it is too small for me," Mrs. Davenport remarked, with a critical glance at the well-proportioned figure of the other.

"Yes, I should think it would fit."

"It is a demi-train, but as you are fully three inches taller than I am, it will come about to the tops of your boots, so it will be a sort of a compromise between a long dress and a short one."

"Oh, yes, I will not mind that, and I presume after I get used to the stage that I will not mind the short dresses."

"Of course not! it is a mere matter of business!" the other declared. "Now we will try this on and see what alterations it needs. I have the silk stockings to match and your own boots will do, for it does not make any difference in a place like this. It is not like a regular theater where one is expected to have everything in style."

"Yes, I can understand that, and I think that you are ever so kind to take so much trouble on my account, but I will try some day to repay you for it. I have a long memory and I seldom forget either friend or foe."

"Oh, I know that without your telling me!" the other declared. "I am certain that you are no shallow-headed girl, for all you do look to be so innocent and artless, and I should not be at all surprised if you have the brass to go on and face the audience as if you had been in the song and dance business all your life."

Adrienne laughed, and shook her head at the candid speaker.

"I do not mind what you say, for I have got used to you now, and I have no doubt that your bark is a great deal worse than your bite."

"Well, I know I have not the dogged determination that some women possess," Mrs. Davenport observed. "I flare up quickly and

fly in a passion, and then it is soon over. If I had not been easy-going I would not have stood Ned Davenport's nonsense as long as I did, but I finally got my mad up at last and then I left him. The fellow has ruined all my life though, for I shall never trust a man again as long as I live."

"I can hardly blame you."

During this conversation Miss Richmond's dress had been removed and Mrs. Davenport had robed her in the stage costume.

"It is a little too loose, but as you do not go on until to-morrow night we will have plenty of time to alter it."

"Oh, yes."

And then Mrs. Davenport in deciding about the alterations chanced to place her hand on the breast of the girl and an exclamation of surprise came from her.

"What is it?" asked Adrienne in a very innocent way.

"Oh, you are a thorough humbug and no mistake!" the other declared.

"What has started you off again?"

"Why, you have a revolver concealed in your bosom!" Mrs. Davenport exclaimed. "And a good-sized one, too. No little pop-gun toy such as women generally carry when they think they need a weapon."

"Oh, you are altogether too sharp!" Miss Richmond exclaimed, but she did not attempt to say that the supposition was not correct.

"I knew that you were both deep and dangerous the moment that I looked at you!" Mrs. Davenport declared.

Miss Richmond laughed but did not reply.

Then the fancy costume was removed and Adrienne resumed her street dress.

"Now you want to make up your mind what you are going to sing and have Dutchy—he's the violin player, Brackel is his name, but nobody calls him anything but Dutchy—come up to your room and rehearse. He's a good man but awful slow and stupid and cranky. I will speak to Bozain and have him sent up."

"If you will be so kind," and then the conversation changed; Mrs. Davenport got out her sewing materials and while the two worked on the dress they chatted upon various subjects, none of which are of interest to the reader, and so we leave them.

CHAPTER IX.

A SPECULATION.

LONG HANK had to stand considerable joking on account of his damaged frontispiece, and although he protested vigorously that the bruises were caused by his accidentally running against an open door in the dark, he being considerably under the influence of liquor at the time, yet the statement was received by jeers and he was unmercifully chaffed at every place he entered.

In one saloon in particular, the Royal Gin Palace, as it was grandiloquently called, a place kept by an Englishman known as Liverpool Jack, and one of the driver's favorite resorts, the joking at his expense was so extensive that the driver's wrath was roused.

"Say, let up!" he exclaimed. "Blame it all! you fellows talk as if no man ever got a black eye except from another fellow's fist."

"Oh, that is all right!" the barkeeper replied, a burly fellow called Bobby Bendigo, who was the champion bruiser of the town. "That will do to stuff the gang with, but we coves who are hup to a thing or two know better than that!"

And then the little group of loungers in the saloon laughed uproariously.

"The hull trouble is, ye know, you have run hup ag'in' some man who understood how to handle his dukes, and he gave you Tom Sayers's favorite smash between the heyes; many is the time that I have seen that blooming champion put in his 'auctioneer,' as he called his favorite mauley, and lay his man out with one good clip."

The barkeeper was looked upon as an oracle when he spoke upon pugilistic matters.

He claimed to be the grandson of the famous English fighting man known as Bendigo, who at one time was supposed by the sporting men of the "tight little island" to be without a rival in the prize-ring.

Since coming to Golden Plume he had met and defeated three of the "supposed to be" great fighting men of the town in regular prize-ring contests, and therefore was looked upon to be invincible.

"It won't go down, this 'ere door story, ye know!" the bartender continued. "You have run hup ag'in' a man who knew how to handle himself, and that is how you came to grief, and I must say from the looks of your peepers that the cove wot did the damage was a mighty hard hitter."

There was another laugh from the loungers at the driver's expense, and then the landlord joined in.

"You ought to git this cove to come to Golden Plume!" he declared. "You could match him ag'in' Bobby 'ere, and if he could best Bobby you could pick up a whole barrel of money!"

"Yes, that is the dodge!" the bruiser exclaimed. "If you can scare up a good man for a scrap I would go him for as much money as you kin raise, and we kin charge the boys a couple of

dollars a head to see the mill and the gate would run up to two hundred ducats, sure!"

While the speaker was making this proposition a brilliant idea had come to Long Hank.

Why would it not be a good scheme to match the iron-fisted sport against the boss bruiser, as he was fond of terming himself?

The driver felt satisfied that the sport would be a match for the Englishman.

He had seen Bendigo fight and knew just what he could do, and in his way of thinking there was no doubt the sport could defeat him easily.

Then, too, Long Hank had put on the gloves and boxed with the barkeeper, and although he got the worst of the encounter, yet the bruiser had not handled him as the sport had succeeded in doing.

The only doubtful thing, as far as he could see, was the uncertainty as to whether he could get the sport to go into the affair or not.

"Oh, you are jest spoiling for a fight then," he said.

"Yes, I'm getting rusty!" the barkeeper declared. "I hain't knocked a man out for six months, and I am jest hungry for a chance to git at some cove and show him a few points in the hart of 'jab, stop, and git away.'" The Englishman would take liberties with his h's once in a while.

"Wal, now, I reckon I know a man who would be apt to make a pretty good fight with you," Long Hank remarked.

"He's the blooming cove I am looking for!" the bruiser exclaimed. "Jest you trot him hup 'ere as quick as you kin, so I kin make a match with him. If he kin make me cry quits he kin git away with a couple of hundred ducats without fail."

"Oh, I don't know as he would be willing to go into it, but when I meet the man I will tell him that there is a chance for him to pick up some money, and mebbe he'll try it on."

"You jest git any man to make a match with me for a hundred, Markis of Queensberry's rules, and I will give you a tenner for your trouble, for I am jest as safe to collar the hundred the moment the match is made as though I had the mopuses in my 'and!" the bouncer declared, boastfully.

"Wal, when I see the man I will speak to him," and with this assurance the driver departed.

He spoke carelessly about the matter, just as if he did not attach much importance to the affair, but in reality he thought he saw a chance to make some money, and had made up his mind to find the sport and make a proposal to him as soon as possible.

The driver was in luck, for he encountered Keene just as he got to the Metropolitan Hotel.

"Hello! you are jest the man I want to see," Long Hank exclaimed.

"Is that so?" queried the sport. "Well, I am here, all right."

"Come into the hotel, I have a leetle business matter that I want to talk over with you."

Then the driver led the way into the hotel, and the two took seats at one of the tables which was in a corner by the window, remote from the bar, where a conversation could be carried on without any danger of its being overheard.

"How are you making out, sport?" the driver asked.

"Well, it is rather early in the game for me to answer a question of that kind," Keene replied, a little evasively.

"Oh, I ain't asking jest for the sake of hearing myself talk, or to pry inter your business," the driver declared. "I hain't got much curiosity, and I don't ever trouble myself to poke my nose in business which don't consarn me."

"Well, as far as my experience goes that is the right way to get along in this world."

"I reckon it is. Oh, I am reg'lar old business now, and you kin jest bet yer dollars onto it every time, and you will be sure to corral the ducats."

"Dead sure, eh?" the sport remarked, with a smile.

"Oh, yes!" the driver assented, confidently. "I don't know much about you, sport, but I kinder got the idee that you ain't any better beeled than you ought to be."

"Your surmise is correct. I have not so much money as to need a treasurer to aid me in taking care of it."

"This is something more than wind, you know; this is business," the driver declared. "And the reason I am axing how you are fixed is that I jest run across a little speculation which I think there is some money in, if I kin induce you to go into the thing."

"I am open for an offer, and I am not flush," the sport replied. "I thought I might be able to strike a small game, but I must admit that the men with whom I would be forced to play are a leetle too tough. I want money badly enough, but I will be hanged if care to get it by playing with any of the hard cases I have run across to-day. I have always tried to be a gentleman, even though I am a sport, but the men who play the twenty-five cent ante poker game in this camp are the meanest crowd I have ever struck. I reckon that if I succeeded in winning five dollars of any of them, it would end in my

having to fight the whole gang, and though I profess to be able to take care of myself, and do not object to a scrap if anybody around is spoiling for a fight, yet I do not propose to run the risk of being done up by a gang for the sake of a paltry five dollars."

"Sport, I kin give you a chance to rake in a couple of hundred!" Long Hank declared, impressively.

"You can?"

"You bet!"

"You are just the man I am looking for then! Go ahead and explain!"

The driver did so and Keene listened attentively while Long Hank related his conversation with the boss bruiser.

"Well, this is a little out of my line," the sport remarked in a reflective way. "I am a gambler, but this speculation calls for a pugilist."

"Sport, if you are as handy with the pasteboards as you are with your fists you must be away at the top of the heap when card-sharps are around!" the driver exclaimed.

"And then I have no money for the stake."

"I will find that!" Long Hank exclaimed. "I have a hundred deposited with the Express Company here which I kin git of the agent at any time. I drive for the Express Company, you know, and Jerry Downing, the Express agent hyer, is one of the boys, and he has a grudge ag'in' Liverpool Jack and his gang too, for he backed the last man that fought Bendigo and is kinder sore over his losses. When I explain to him what kind of a man you are, he will be jest ripe to go in to git square with Liverpool Jack."

"That is natural."

"Liverpool and his crowd are so confident that Bendigo kin git away with anybody, that they will back him to their last dollar, and Jerry will have a chance to bet all the money he wants to put up, and I will make an arrangement with him to give you an interest in the bets; then, too, I will give you half the stake if you win, so w'ot with the stake, the gate money and the bets, you stand a good chance to pull in a couple of hundred dollars."

"Quite an alluring prospect for fifteen or twenty minutes' work, for the chances are that the affair will not last longer than that if the man is what you represent him to be."

"Sport, I have given it to you as straight as a string!" the driver declared.

"Will he be willing to fight right away without taking time to train, think you?"

"Oh, yes, that has allers been the way the thing has been worked. The match was made one day and pulled off the next."

"And this boxer is the barkeeper?"

"Yes."

"And drinks a good deal, I suppose?"

"Oh, you bet! He is h'isting in the bug-juice all day and night! I doubt if the galoot goes to bed sober once a week."

"He must be all out of condition then and carrying a great deal of fat?"

"Oh, yes, he's as fat as a hog. You jest ought to see the stomach on him—like an alderman's!"

"But he has always succeeded in defeating the men who fought with him," the sport said, reflectively.

"But he hain't had a scrap for six months, and then he was in a much better condition. He didn't used to drink so much, and was not fat, and then the galoots he knocked out were men of my kidney, galoots who thought that they knew a heap about boxing until they got in a ring with a man who has made a business of fighting and then they found that they didn't know half as much as they thought they did."

"Well, I will tell you what I will do," the sport remarked, after thinking the matter over for a few minutes. "As far as I can see this is a good speculation, and though I am not anxious to win a name as a prize-fighter, yet I am so situated that if I could pick up a couple of hundred dollars it would help me along amazingly, so I will go and have a look at this man. If I find that he is the sort of fellow you represent him to be, and I think I stand a fair show to win, I will go into the thing."

"That is all right!" the driver declared, highly delighted. "It is dollars to cents that you will take a hack at the speculation, for you will find that the cuss is jest as I say. I ain't making no mistake you know, for I am not fool enough to put up my hundred dollars without I think I stand a big chance to win."

"You would be unwise indeed to go into the affair if you did not think all the advantage was on your side."

"You kin bet yer bottom dollar I wouldn't! I wasn't born yesterday!"

"I will go up to the place, walk in and get a drink, so as to have an opportunity to size the man up, and if you will wait here I will give you an answer inside of half-an-hour."

"All right! I will wait."

"As I am a stranger, no one in the Gin Palace will be apt to suspect my business."

"Oh, no! They would have to be mighty smart to do that."

"I will be back in twenty or thirty minutes."

"Take yer time, I'm in no hurry!" the driver replied.

Then the sport departed.

Long Hank waited for his return in perfect confidence that the answer would be a favorable one.

The driver had not long to wait.

Before twenty minutes had expired the sport re-entered the saloon and resumed his former seat.

"Well, did you take it in?"

"Oh, yes."

"And wasn't things as I said?"

"They were."

"And you will go into the speculation?"

"Yes, to use the expressive slang, I think you have struck a regular pudding!" the sport declared.

"Didn't I tell you so?" Long Hank exclaimed.

"From the fellow's appearance I should imagine that in his day he had been a pretty good man, but he is old, stale and fat, and if he is able to stand up before me for fifteen minutes I shall be surprised."

"So would I be."

"A half-a-dozen good blows in his wind and he will be a goner!"

"Come over to the Express Office so I can introduce you to Jerry!" the driver cried, and then the two departed.

When the Express agent learned the particulars he was as eager to go into the scheme as the driver, and within another hour the match was made, and soon the news spread around the camp that Bobby Bendigo had agreed to "stop" Long Hank's Unknown in ten rounds.

CHAPTER X.

BOWERS IS WARNED.

KEENE waited at the Express Office while Long Hank made the arrangements for the match, and it was at the sport's suggestion that Long Hank made the offer to the burly Bendigo to produce a man whom the fighter could not "stop" in ten rounds.

The sharp shrewdly observed:

"There is an old sporting saying that a match well made is half won, and while we are about it we may as well start in with all the advantage on our side that we can possibly secure. The odds are big, and this Englishman is so confident in his skill as a fighter that he will be agreeable to make a match that I can't stay ten rounds with him, and if we can make an arrangement of that kind, you will be safe in betting two to one I will win."

The sport was right in his conjecture; the bruiser had so good an opinion of himself that he was glad to accept the offer.

After leaving the saloon, Long Hank was careful not to return directly to the Express Office for he was afraid of being followed by some spy anxious to ascertain who was the unknown.

But he was not watched.

The Englishman and his friends were so confident that there wasn't a man in the town who stood any chance in a match of this kind opposed to the bruiser that it was a matter of perfect indifference to them who the unknown was, and not one of them would have taken any trouble to find out.

It was with a great deal of satisfaction that Long Hank announced that all the arrangements had been made, and slapped a ten-dollar bill down on the table in front of Keene.

"Thar, sport, jest stow that away in yer pocket!" he exclaimed.

"What is this?" Keene asked.

"That is the first sp'iles of the war," the driver replied. "That durned galoot of a prize-fighter is so sart'in that no man can be scared up in the town who stands any show with him that he tried a bold bluff on me by saying that if I could git a man who would make a match with him he would give me ten dollars."

Keene laughed, for this incident appeared to him to be funny.

"And he was as good as his word, eh?"

"Now, you had better believe that he was!" Long Hank replied. "The moment the articles were signed, he pulled out his roll and put up his saw-buck like a little man, saying as how he could allers afford to pay ten ducats for the sake of making a hundred."

"Confident, isn't he?" the sport exclaimed, sarcastically.

"Oh, yes, he reckins he's got a sure thing!" the driver replied.

"These supposed to be sure things turn out to be mighty uncertain sometimes," Keene observed.

"You see this hyer galoot has jest been spoilt," Long Hank explained. "He has had such a picnic with the men he has run up ag'in' since he struck the town that he don't think anybody kin be scared up who kin best him."

"I will do my best to change his opinion in regard to that matter," the sport declared.

"You kin do it!" the driver exclaimed, emphatically. "And it is my notion that you kin do it pretty easily, too. If Bendigo was the man that he was when he first struck the camp, and had the fights which made people think he was a terror, mebbe you would have to hustle a little, but even then I would put up every ducat I have got, or ever expect to git, that you would

take him into camp; but now, with the man as fat as a hog and full of licker all the time, you will be able to lay him out and have something left over."

"Yes, I do not think you have made any mistake about the matter, although this is an uncertain world," the sport remarked.

"You bet! but it is long odds that you will clean up the dust this time, and hyer is ten as a starter," and the driver pushed the bill over to Keene.

"Yes, but really this is your gains, you know," the sharp observed.

"Nary time! If it had not been for you, I would not have been able to have corraled it, and so I reckon you have a better claim to it than a chap 'bout my size!" Long Hank declared. "And then, didn't I understand you to say that you wasn't over and above flush?"

"Yes, that is the truth," Keene answered.

"Then this will come right handy, and it will keep you until the fight takes place; it is to come off the night after to-morrow. I tried to fix it for to-morrow night, but the galoot is going off with a gunning party to-morrow, and he wouldn't have it that way."

"A day more or less does not make any difference," Keene remarked. "If he had asked for a month, so as to train some of the fat off of him and get in a fit state for a contest, then there might be some reason to object, but the man is so utterly out of condition that it would take fully a month to get him really fit for a fight."

"Bless you! he is so sart'in the thing will be a walk-over for him that I reckon he would laugh at the notion he ought to train for to git himself in a good condition."

"If I succeed in knocking him out he will be a wiser man after the contest than he was before it," Keene observed. "But touching this ten dollars, I will not deny that it will come in mighty handy, and if you think I have the best right to the money, I will be glad to take it."

"Sport, you are welcome to it, and then thar's a leetle lesson which you give me, and which I didn't settle for," and the driver grinned, while the Express agent laughed outright.

"All right, I will take the ten, and we'll call the thing square," Keene declared, rising and pocketing the bill.

"We will attend to the betting," the Express agent said, "and if you succeed in cooking the Englishman's goose you can depend upon pulling in a good stake."

"If I don't win it will not be for the want of trying," Keene replied, and then he departed.

"Things are coming my way," the sport remarked, as he walked toward the Metropolitan Hotel. "Unless I have made a big mistake in regard to this bruiser I shall be able to settle him without much trouble, and if I do, that puts me in funds at once."

"If it nets me two or three hundred, and it ought to do that, I can hold my own without any difficulty, for with a stake like that at my back I can go into a big game where, if things come my way, I will be able to clean up a thousand or two."

As will be seen by this speech, the sport felt very confident in regard to the future.

He entered the hotel and made arrangements to take a room for a week.

"By the way, didn't you come to town in the coach with Miss Richmond?" the landlord asked, as he gave the sport the number of his room.

"Yes; and a very nice young lady she seemed to be, too."

"Did you hear how she was disappointed?"

"No; how was that?"

Then the landlord related the story of the girl, and Keene listened as attentively as though it was all new to him.

"And she is going to try what she can do on the stage, eh?"

"Yes, and I shouldn't be surprised if she did right well too!" the landlord declared.

At this point the sport saw the veteran Joe Bowers strolling along the street and he went forth to meet him.

"Ah! you are just the man for my money!" Joe Bowers declared. "I was jest a-reckon whereabouts I should strike you, for I war into the hotel awhile ago and they said you wasn't there."

"Did you get the information I wanted?" the sport asked.

"Wal, now you kin bet your bottom dollar I did, me noble dook! and that is the kind of a hair-pin I am!" Old Benzine declared.

And then he proceeded to tell the story of Kingsley's departure from the camp, just as the landlord had related it to Adrienne.

"You kin depend upon this yarn as being as straight as a string for I got it from Paddy Kelly who works in the mine!" Joe Bowers declared at the conclusion of the tale.

"Oh, the story is all," the sport observed. "I was talking with the Express agent and his account of Kingsley's going away was exactly the same. By the way, there is going to be a chance for a little speculation the day after to-morrow so you must try and get hold of some cash."

"Oh, me prophetic soul, me uncle, that is to say, Paddy Kelly!" cried the irrepressible bummer striking an attitude. "I kin raise a loan

out of him, for I have got the galoot so he kin deal from the bottom of the pack now without dropping mor'n one card out of five, and as he thinks he is on the high road to success I kin strike him for a stake."

"I will put you up to the time of day to-morrow," the sport remarked. "That will give you plenty of time to make your bets for the affair does not come off until the day after to-morrow."

"Say! is this hyer match 'tween Bendigo and Long Hank's Unknown?" Joe Bowers exclaimed.

"Oh, you have heard of it then?"

"You bet! the news is flying 'round the camp pretty lively, and the boyees are getting ready to put up their ducats on the bold Bendigo!"

"Are they offering any odds?"

"Yes, six to four on the Englishman."

"They have a good opinion of him."

"Not so much that as a bad one of the Unknown. The boyees don't take much stock in Long Hank's being able to find anybody to stand up for ten rounds ag'in' Bendigo. You see they have been counting noses, and they don't see where the man is coming from."

"He will be on hand, and you are safe in betting five to one that when the time is called at the end of the tenth round the Unknown will be to the fore, although there is a doubt about the Englishman."

A sudden light appeared to the veteran.

"I twigs, me lord!" he cried. "You have struck a soft snap!"

"Yes, but don't give it away. Talk Bendigo up until you can get two to one on him, and then put up every dollar you can get against him!"

"I'll be thar, large as life and twice as natural!" Joe Bowers declared.

And then the two parted; the veteran went on down the street and the sport returned to the hotel.

CHAPTER XI.

THE LANDLORD AND THE SPORT.

UPON entering the hotel Keene was hailed by the landlord.

There was no one in the place but the host, so the pair had the saloon to themselves.

"Say, Mr. Keene, I have jest been speculating 'bout you," Bozain remarked.

"Is that so?" the sport replied, approaching and leaning upon the bar behind which the landlord sat.

"Yes, you were hyer 'bout a week ago and stopped with me a day or two?"

"I was."

"Well, I reckoned you were a miner then—you had a pard with you, and if I remember the thing straight he said he had a big strike down at Murphy's Clearing."

"That was his lay-out, but the thing wasn't exactly as he represented it." And then Keene explained how he had been fooled by the guileless miner.

"It is the old story, ain't it?" Bozain exclaimed, with a knowing shake of his head. "Why, I have heered of jest such a racket as that more times than I have fingers and toes since I have been out hyer in the mining country!"

"Oh, it is an old game of course, and the fellow would not have fooled me if he hadn't been such a confounded innocent duck," the sport declared. "If he had been a regular mining shark I would have spotted his little game in short order, but as he was a fool himself he succeeded in making one of me."

"Mining ain't your business then?" the landlord remarked, after making a careful examination of Keene.

"No, I'm a speculator," the other replied with a quiet smile.

"Yes, I reckon I understand," and the landlord grinned. "Speculator in pasteboards and ivory and sich truck."

"You have hit it, but pasteboards, colored, are my best holt!" Keene admitted.

"Well, I reckoned so from your ginerall make-up, and that is the reason why I spoke to you. I am something of a rounder myself, you know, and I am very fond of a leetle game of draw, on the sly, you understand, for my wife would kick up a furious row in the wigwam if she knew that I indulged in anything of the kind. She reckons I can make more money running a hotel than I kin in playing poker."

"Maybe she is right," the sport remarked in a reflective way. "Some of these women have a heap of sense and hit the bull's-eye every time. Of course I don't know how good a game you can play, but one thing is sure there are not many men in this world who get rich by playing poker."

"Well, now, I tell you, stranger, I play a mighty good game, and a big stiff one too when I git fairly waked up!" the landlord declared, proudly.

"You are just the man I am looking for!" Keene declared with a deal of earnest warmth.

"If I can succeed in roping you into a poker game about once a week, maybe I will not have to pay you any board."

Bozain looked surprised at this candid declaration, particularly as the sport made it with

a grave face, not betraying any indications that he was jesting.

"Well, I don't know about that," he said, slowly. "Although I am fond of a game of keerds I am no man's fool, you know, and if I took three or four hacks at you and made the discovery that you were too big a chief for me to tackle, you kin bet your sweet life that I would not go on and let you skin me right straight along."

"That declaration shows that your head is level!" Keene exclaimed. "After a man finds out that he does not stand any chance in the game that he is playing he is a donkey if he keeps on."

"Of course."

"But if the majority of men who gamble were not donkeys, sports of my description would starve to death," the sharp remarked with the air of a philosopher.

The landlord reflected upon this statement for a moment and then admitted that he believed it was correct.

"You are safe in betting on it, sir," Keene remarked in his precise way. "The average man who plays cards with a professional gambler, who puts his amateur skill against that of a man who makes it a business, is seldom satisfied that he is not a match for the professional, no matter how often he loses; he blames everything but his own want of skill."

"You are right! The card sharps would not be able to make a living if it wasn't so," the landlord remarked. "But I will be hanged if you or any other sport kin play me for a sucker—that is, not for long!"

"Oh, as far as I am concerned, I will let you down easy," the sport observed. "If you will let me win my board and my bar bill—and I am not much of a drinker—out of you every week, I shall be perfectly satisfied."

The landlord stared at the sport for a moment, who kept a straight face, merely smiling blandly.

"The blazes you will!" Bozain declared.

"Oh, yes, I will not ask anything more. If I can get my board and bar bill out of you, I shall be deuced unlucky if I can't get my clothes and spending-money out of the rest of the gang."

"Say! I reckon that you are considerable of a joker," the landlord observed, having come to the conclusion that the sport was making game of him.

"Oh, yes, I joke once in a while!" Keene admitted.

"You are so durned serious that I will be hanged if I did not think you were in earnest."

"Oh, but I am, as you will find out if you have the sand to test what I am made of!" Keene declared.

"Well, now, you can bet your boots that I will try you on," the landlord replied. "Mebbe you think you can scare me, but you can't work any trick of that kind on me!"

"Ah, you are a man of metal!" Keene exclaimed. "I thought that you had plenty of sand the moment I set eyes on you!"

"Nobody said I hadn't yet!"

"All I want is one hack at you, and if I don't stick you for a month's board, with the bar bill thrown in, and maybe ten dollars for spending-money, then I am not the man I think I am!"

"Oh, I see your game!" the host declared. "You want to git me worked up, but I don't keer a rap for that! Durned if I don't try you one rastle, jest to find out for my own satisfaction how big a chief you are!"

"That is the way to talk! You are just the kind of man that I like to stack up against once in a while!" Keene declared.

"But, I say, all this hyer talk has kinder thrown me off from what I was going to say," the landlord remarked. "I made up my mind that you was a sport when you wanted a room, so I gave you one right next to the parlor, on the right-hand side of the entry, and that reminds me, it is kinder odd you and Miss Richmond came in the same coach, and I have given you rooms right opposite."

"Is that so?" the sport remarked, carelessly, although he was glad to ascertain where Miss Richmond was lodged without going to the trouble of "spying out the land."

"Yes, both on you are right next to the parlor, and what I wanted to say was that if you strike anybody who wants a quiet little game you kin run them right into the parlor, for that is what I fitted up the room for. It is nice, quiet and retired up there, and there is no chance for any loungers to come in and disturb the game. There is a little dumb-waiter here so I can send up drinks when they are required," and the landlord opened a little door in the wall back of the bar revealing the apparatus.

"All right, I am glad you mentioned the matter," the sport remarked. "For if I had run across anybody anxious for a little amusement I would not have known where to have taken them and they might have run in some place, as I am a stranger in the town, where I could not have stood any show for my white alley."

"Oh, yes, there are two or three shebangs in town where a stranger wouldn't stand any chance!" the landlord declared. "Besides, a sport like yourself—a man who tries to run

things in a polite and gentlemanly way, 'cos I kin see that is the kind of game you play—wants a headquarters where people will be able to find him if they take it into their heads that they are hungry for a little poker."

"You see if you are a good player it will soon get around the camp and there will be plenty anxious to find out jest how good you are."

"No doubt! Well, I am much obliged, and I think I will go up-stairs and take a look at my quarters."

"All right. It is the last door, just before you come to the parlor. On the right hand!"

The sport nodded and then departed.

CHAPTER XII.

GETTING AT THE MYSTERY.

KEENE went up-stairs, examined his room, which was a counterpart of all the other sleeping apartments in the house, being but little better than a good-sized closet, then took a look at the parlor.

"I wondered when I was here before, why the landlord took the trouble to fit up the room," he remarked, as he glanced around the apartment, for he has so few lady guests that it hardly seemed to be worth while to provide a parlor for their accommodation, but it never struck me that it was poker parties, for such rooms are usually on the ground floor in the rear of the saloon so that the liquid refreshments—which is where the house comes in—can be readily furnished, but I never thought of a dumb waiter, which is a new wrinkle in a camp of this kind."

Then the sport took another look around the room.

"It seems to me that Miss Richmond and myself can have a nice, quiet talk here without any danger of anybody disturbing or of being able to overhear the conversation, if we are careful to speak in moderate tones," he mused. "Then, by allowing the door to remain open as it is at present we will have timely warning of the approach of any one, for the length of the entry must be traversed before the room can be reached."

"It will do admirably! And at this time of day too there is little danger of our being disturbed."

Having come to this conclusion the sport knocked at the door of Miss Richmond's room.

Adrienne appeared in answer to the summons, and she greeted the sport with a smile.

"I have been expecting you," she said. "And when I heard your knock I felt sure that it was no one but yourself."

"If you will take the trouble to come into the parlor I think we can talk there as long as we like without any likelihood of our being disturbed or of any one hearing what we say," the sport remarked.

"Yes, that was the conclusion to which I came," the young girl replied.

Then Keene proceeded to the parlor, followed by Adrienne.

They took seats, and then the sport spoke:

"I got the information you required without any difficulty," Keene said, and then he related the story he had been told in regard to Kingsley's abrupt departure.

"I have ascertained some facts in regard to the matter in addition to what you have heard," Adrienne remarked, and then she related what the landlord had told her about sending away Mr. Kingsley's trunk, and Bozain's idea that the old gentleman had secretly departed under cover of the night, for fear that the stage might be stopped by road-agents if he delayed to take passage in it.

The sport listened attentively and then shook his head, and this fact coupled with the expression on his face led her to believe that he did not share the landlord's opinion.

"You do not think that Mr. Bozain has hit upon the truth?" Adrienne asked.

"No, I do not. In the first place it is a long and rough ride from here to White Oaks. I know for I have ridden to Murphy's Clearing, one-half the distance, and it is not a journey which any man would be apt to take if he could avoid it, and from what I have heard about this Mr. Kingsley, it appears to me that he would be about the last man in the world to try such a trip, for he was well along in years and in poor health, and I doubt if he was physically strong enough to make the trip."

"That is the truth, for when he wrote to me he said he was not well and he did not expect to live much longer."

"Then in regard to his fear of being robbed by road-agents if he waited for the stage, that is all nonsense!" the sport declared. "All he had to do was to go to the Express Office, deposit his money and take their receipt, the cash to be delivered to him at any prominent point which he might designate. That would provide for the safe-keeping of his money all right and he could take the stage with the blissful knowledge that forty road-agents might attack it without being able to get at his funds."

"Yes, that is true, and as an old and experienced man of business he surely must have been aware that he could do this," the young girl observed, thoughtfully.

"Certainly! as the French expression is, that goes without saying," the sport replied. "Then in regard to the trunk, it seems to me that there is something very suspicious about the business. He would have to wait at White Oaks to get it and there would be fully as much danger of his being waylaid by road-agents in getting away from that camp as from this one."

"But Mr. Bozain said that he received a written message about sending the trunk."

"A forged order is a very simple thing, and could be easily arranged. Then the landlord is a careless, good-natured fellow, and the chances are great that he could be deceived in a matter of this kind without any trouble."

"Yes, undoubtedly!" Miss Richmond exclaimed, in a tone of conviction.

"The whole affair has an odd, mysterious look, and the more I hear about it the stronger becomes my impression that there is something wrong. I am not a detective, you know, and never had any experience in that line, but I am satisfied that this affair is not straight."

"So am I!" the girl declared in deep, impressive tones. "And I fancy that you, like myself, have jumped to a conclusion about this matter."

"Yes, you are right, I certainly have."

"Would you mind telling me the conclusion to which you have come?" Adrienne asked, earnestly.

"Of course not!" the sport replied. "I consider that you are entitled to know, for if it were not for you I would not have been interested in the matter at all."

"Yes, that is true; I really dragged you into it against your better judgment, perhaps," the girl remarked with a sad smile.

All the mask of cheerfulness was gone now, and a sorrowful expression was on the handsome features.

"Oh, no, it isn't that way at all. I went into the matter willingly enough," the sport replied. "I have very little to do in the daytime! to occupy my time, and I might as well busy myself with a case of this kind as to lounge in the hotel."

"You are very kind!" the girl declared, and this time there was the ring of truth in her words, quite different from the false notes which pervaded her voice when she had on the mask of deceitfulness.

"Tell me frankly, then, what you think about the matter, and then I will reveal to you the conclusion at which I have arrived."

"It is my opinion that Kingsley never left this camp!" the sport declared, in deep and earnest tones.

"You think that he was murdered here?" Adrienne asked, in a voice but a little above a whisper.

"Yes, I do."

"And the reason for the dreadful crime?"

"So that the White Gopher Mine could come into possession of a man who, without he committed this crime, never could hope to own it."

"You think he was murdered by, or at the instigation of this Elliot Van Buren?"

"I do."

There was silence for a moment, Adrienne's gaze was bent upon the floor, then she raised her eyes to the face of the sport, and said, in deep tones:

"I believe so too—I have striven to fight against the conviction, for it is dreadful to think that a human life could be so lightly taken, but the more I reflect upon the matter the stronger becomes my belief that the man who now claims to own the White Gopher Mine murdered the original possessor."

"It is difficult, from the facts in the case, to come to any other conclusion," Keene remarked.

"So it seems to me."

"As I said before I am not a detective, and therefore not an expert, but I have become interested in this case and have set to work to study it, just as I would study some new game of cards by which I expected to gain my living. And then from my experience with these bloodhounds of the law I have often been impressed with the belief that the current tales about their great smartness was all bosh, and that in reality they do not know any more about the detection of crimes than common, ordinary, every-day men."

"Of course there are exceptions, but I think you are right in regard to the majority of them," the girl observed.

"I never troubled my head about the matter until you got me into this affair, but now, having become interested, I have been thinking up what I know about crimes and criminals," the sport explained.

"As well as I can remember there are certain well-founded rules, a sort of detective creed, which guide these man-hunters, and the first and most important of all is, when a crime is committed look for the criminal in the party who will be benefited by the deed."

"That seems to be good logic, and in this case it indicates Van Buren," Adrienne observed.

"Yes, it certainly does. Kingsley had the White Gopher Mine; he is gone and Van Buren in possession of the property. Now, the question is how did he get it? A piece of property—real

estate, like a mine—cannot be passed from hand to hand like a ten-dollar note.

"You can't knock a man down and take a piece of property out of his pocket and walk off with it."

"Oh yes, I understand that."

"And that fact makes this case a complex one. In transferring a piece of real estate from one owner to another there is a paper to be signed—a legal document which must be witnessed to make it of value, and the party transferring the property must appear before a notary public in order to execute the deed, so that if there is fraud about this transfer of the mine from Kingsley to Van Buren, there must be a number concerned in it. First, there are the two men who witnessed the signatures of the grantor of the deed, then the notary public who is supposed to be personally acquainted with the man who executes the document; that though is often a farce, for if the man is a stranger to the notary one of the others will introduce him, saying, 'Mr. Brown, this is Mr. Smith,' and then with a clear conscience Mr. Brown proceeds to put Mr. Smith through."

"Yes, I can understand how such an affair could be arranged. Any one might be introduced to the notary as Mr. Kingsley."

"Exactly; but when we get hold of the notary we can very speedily find out whether he did know Kingsley or not, and if not, get a description of the man who was introduced as Kingsley."

"I do not see any reason why this cannot be done," the girl observed, thoughtfully.

"There isn't any reason, but—excuse me for putting you through a cross-examination—is it necessary to go to this trouble? I do not want to pry into your business, nor ask you to give me your confidence, but this proceeding will take both time and money, and will the result which you expect justify the going ahead?"

"I understand your position and comprehend that it is now necessary for me to explain what I intend to do," the girl replied, thoughtfully.

"I wouldn't ask, you know, only we are rapidly approaching a point where it will be impossible for me to go ahead in the dark and expect to reap any substantial benefit."

"Oh, I do not fear to trust you, for I believe that you are one man picked out of ten thousand, and I am sure that it was the hand of Heaven itself that brought us together, for I am satisfied that without the aid of some daring, determined man like yourself it would not be possible for me to accomplish anything, for I am only a weak woman, and can only use the weapons of my sex, flattery, smiles and tears; secret cunning must serve me where a man would use open force."

"Very true! but a woman's weapons are mighty powerful sometimes, and a weak woman has often changed the fate of a nation, to say nothing of an individual," the sport commented.

"It is my belief that Mr. Kingsley was murdered so he could be robbed of his property. I think the man who now holds the mine, committed the crime although he may have used a tool to strike the blow."

"My mission is, first, to bring to justice the man, or men, who murdered Mr. Kingsley; second, to recover the property for his heir, for he has one, with all the necessary legal proofs to make good the claim."

"What, suppose you, is the value of the White Gopher Mine?"

"The Express agent, to-day, a well posted man, rated it at being worth over fifty thousand dollars," the sport replied.

"The value of the mine is proof that there has been foul play, for where would this Van Buren, a simple mining engineer, who was brought to this camp by Mr. Kingsley to take charge of this mine, only about a year ago, accumulate any such sum of money as that?" the girl demanded.

"It is not possible of course that he had any such amount, but if the sale was an honest one he may have paid only a thousand dollars or so to bind the bargain and given a mortgage for the rest, but that will appear on the deed, and when we examine the records we will find out all about it."

"Well then, I am fighting for fifty thousand dollars, for I represent the heir, and will not a sum like that be worth the expense of a struggle?" Adrienne demanded.

"I should say it would!" Keene exclaimed.

"If you spent ten thousand dollars and corralled fifty it would be considered to be a pretty good speculation."

"It is my belief that when we come to look at the deed we will find that there isn't any mortgage on the mine, that it is free, and the sole property of Elliot Van Buren."

"I am not much of a lawyer," the sport observed, thoughtfully, "but I know that if we come to a legal fight in regard to the transfer, one of the first questions which would be put to Van Buren will be where he got the fifty thousand dollars to pay for the mine, and if he cannot or will not explain, it will throw a deal of doubt upon the transaction."

"Yes, certainly! Now there is another point, but in order to get at that I must explain my situation at present," Adrienne remarked, "I am

here alone and without money, nor is there any means by which I can get funds by sending away, so I am compelled to rely upon myself, for I must have money, first, that I may be able to live, second to enable me to hunt down and bring to justice this concealed murderer."

"Oh, yes, without money we cannot do much in this world; money is the sinews of war."

"The powerful lever which moves the world and yet requires no fulcrum upon which to rest!" the girl declared.

"That is a good illustration and it is true too."

"In order to get money I have arranged to sing nightly in the saloon below."

The sport looked surprised.

"Well, that is an odd idea, I must say!" he exclaimed.

"In my case it is Hobson's choice—I have no other recourse," she remarked, a sad smile playing upon her strongly marked features.

"The idea is a good one and if you succeed in pleasing the miners, there is no doubt that you will make plenty of money."

"I will succeed!" the girl exclaimed in the most confident way, "I have no fears in regard to the result. Through making this arrangement I became acquainted with the lady who is now performing."

"Lily Davenport?"

"Yes."

"I saw her when I was in the camp on my first visit."

"She was very kind, and has loaned me a dress for my appearance; we got into conversation, and she with that inclination that some people have to confide their troubles to others, told me the story of her marriage to Edward Davenport, who was the bookkeeper and treasurer of the White Gopher Mine."

"Aha! that was a lucky chance!" the sport declared.

Davenport, a fine business man, but a terribly hard drinker, was discharged twice by Mr. Kingsley, but taken back because his wife and the two prominent men of the mine, Van Buren and Gotterang, the superintendent, pleaded for him.

"Davenport is a penman of such ability that he can do anything possible with the pen."

"There is the man who got up the papers, then!" the sport declared, rubbing his hands briskly together. "Upon my word! we are really getting a little light on the subject."

"Mr. Kingsley is gone, but Davenport is still attached to the mine, drinking harder than ever, though; works when he feels like it, and stops when he doesn't."

"A nice, agreeable sort of way to get along!"

"The new owner, Van Buren, does not seem to care, says the man is drinking himself to death, and cannot last much longer, but Davenport is such a good fellow that Gotterang and he will see that he does not want for anything!"

"Oh, it is as plain as the nose on a man's face!" the sport declared.

"Davenport is the tool who did the work—forged the papers, and this precious pair do not dare to interfere with his having his own way, for they are in his power."

"Yes, yes, I feel sure that that is the truth!"

"And they are undoubtedly supplying him with all the liquor he can drink in hopes that he will come to a speedy end, and then they will be able to breathe more freely."

"Your ideas are exactly the same as mine!"

"Well, under the circumstances, I don't see how anybody can come to any different conclusion," Keene remarked.

"These three men are the ones who contrived the plot to which Mr. Kingsley fell a victim. Van Buren is, probably, the chief, and the others are his tools."

"We can get at the mystery if we take time, and have a little money to help us!"

"I will soon have some!" the girl said, confidently.

"Well, I expect to make a stake in a day or two, and I can help you out."

"I will accept it if I need it, for I feel sure we will win, and then I can pay you back."

"You are quite welcome, and I am not at all afraid of the security."

"We must win, for Heaven is on our side, and it is not possible that this red-handed murderer will be allowed to enjoy his ill-gotten gains in peace!" Adrienne exclaimed.

"At any rate we'll leave no stone unturned to make things lively for him!" the sport declared.

"One of the first things to be done, Miss Richmond, is to have somebody at White Oaks, which is the county seat, where the records are kept, go and examine the deed given by Kingsley to Van Buren, so as to ascertain all the particulars in regard to it."

"Yes, I understand; that will put us in possession of the facts."

"Exactly! Then we can see who the witnesses are—what Van Buren paid for the mine, and all the particulars."

"And you will attend to this?" the young girl exclaimed, a grateful expression on her face.

"Yes, just as soon as I get some money. I shall have to employ a lawyer, you know, and gentlemen in that line of business require a fee to set them to work."

"I will have some money to-morrow night, if I don't make a failure," and Miss Richmond laughed in a way to suggest that she did not feel much fear that she would not succeed.

"Hello! there's some one coming up-stairs, so I will get out!" Keene exclaimed.

CHAPTER XIII. THE PROFESSOR.

KEENE'S ears were wonderfully quick, and as he had discovered that somebody was coming up-stairs the moment the ascent was begun, he was able to get out of the parlor and into his own room before the new-comers, for there were two of them, could reach the entry.

Miss Richmond understood why the sport retreated without his having to explain the matter.

It was evident that there was a difficult fight before them, and it would be decidedly to their disadvantage to allow any one to suspect that they were working in concert.

The new-comers were Bozain, the landlord, and a short, fat gentleman, almost as broad as he was long, whose yellow hair and beard, mild blue eyes, and heavy features, proclaimed his Teutonic origin.

Under his arm the stout gentleman carried a violin in a box.

The host ushered him into the parlor and, with a flourish, introduced him to the young lady.

"Miss Richmond, this is Professor Von Brackel, the leader of our orchestra."

And the host did not think it was necessary to inform the young lady that the German was not only the leader of the orchestra, but the orchestra itself, for he was the only player.

"I am very glad to meet the gentleman," the lady said with a low courtesy, and the charming smile which was so attractive.

"So blessed!" ejaculated the professor, speaking with a strong accent, and ducking his head in what was intended for a bow, at the same time with his little, keen eyes he regarded the young lady with a deal of curiosity.

"Lily Davenport said as how you ought to have a talk with the leader about yer music," the landlord explained. "And so I run him up."

"You will find Dutchy here a first-class fiddler!" he continued, hitting the professor a hearty slap on the back. "And what he don't know about music ain't worth knowing! He has played for all the big-bugs in the Grand Opery, hain't yer, profess?"

"Yaw, yaw, I blay for dem all!" the German assented.

"Well, Dutchy, we'll put yer through all right," the host remarked. "Now, mind, old man, I want you to do your level best, for if Miss Richmond don't please the boys the chances are big that they will think that it is all your fault, and go for you red hot!"

Then the landlord grinned at Miss Richmond, who answered him with a smile, as a proof that she appreciated the joke; then he retorted:

"Sit you down, my tear, and ve vill see v'at ve can do," said the German, with another duck of his big head, covered with the enormous shock of yellow hair, which bristled up in all directions in the most odd and independent way, as if to bid proud defiance to comb and brush.

The German had his hat in his hand when he entered the room. It was a well-worn, old slouch hat, but he deposited it upon the table with as much care as though he expected that it would be a long time before he got another.

Then, helping himself to a chair, he opened the box and took out the violin.

It was an old, common-looking instrument, and one who knew nothing whatever about violins would be apt to consider that the article was comparatively worthless, but the German handled it with the utmost care; a young mother with her first-born babe could not have been more tender.

Miss Richmond had drawn her chair up close to the professor, and she watched the production of the violin with a deal of curiosity.

"It seems to me that you have a valuable instrument there," she said, after the German had carefully dusted it with a faded silk handkerchief, and adjusted the keys to his satisfaction.

The professor looked at her in surprise.

"V'at you know 'bout violins, hey?" he asked. "Oh, not much, of course, but I think I know the tone of a good violin when I hear it speak, and your instrument sounds like a human voice."

"Ach, Himmel! dot ish so!" the German exclaimed. "You are right, my tear, der goot violin comes der nearest to the human voice of all der instruments dot man have made."

"Man is der great animal! He ish clever—very mooch smart, so mooch so dot sometimes he t'inks dot he ish almost a God, but dot ish because man makes v'at you call a John-donkey mit himseluf sometimes, all de v'ile."

This speech showed that the German was an intelligent man and something of a philosopher.

"Und you vas right, my tear, apout dot violin," he continued. "It vas a poor-looking fiddle, as dot fool landlord calls it all der while, but it vas made by a man who vas a master; he has been gone dead mit der grave dis hundred

years, and I am only a poor fiddler, as dot John Donkey landlord say, but I would not dot violin sell for two hundred tollars, and it would dot sum fetch, my tear, from any musician who his art understands."

"Oh, yes, I can comprehend that readily enough," Miss Richmond observed, with her pleasant, winning smile. "I have had violins in my hands which were estimated to be worth a thousand dollars."

"Yes, yes, dot ish so, but not many of dem are in de world!" the German declared. "They are mooch scarce, like der high diamonds dot only der great kings can to buy afford."

"Precious articles are seldom plentiful," Miss Richmond observed. "If they were they would not be dear, you know."

"Mine gootness! dot vas true. You hafe on your shoulders a head," the professor observed, with what was intended to be a gracious bow.

"Yes, I hope so," she replied, with another one of her charming smiles.

"I t'ink we will hafe mooch pleasure together mit der moosic," the German remarked, with an air of grave deliberation.

"Oh, yes, I do not doubt that we will get along nicely together."

"I can see mit half an eye dot you are der lady. Vhy you come here to dis den, eh?" exclaimed the professor, shaking his head with an expression of great disgust.

"It ish all right for a mans like I am, but I would not here be if I was not of the peer too fond, but I hafe no poddy but mine self und vat difference ish it vhere an old John Donkey stay till der time comes for him to cross mit der dark river?"

"It ish all right, too, for dot Davenport womans," the German continued, shaking his head.

"She vas to dis life mooch used, und she vas as happy here as anywhere else already." And the professor shook his head in a way that plainly said that he did not have a good opinion of Lily Davenport.

"Of course, I do not know much about Mrs. Davenport, but she seems to be very wise, and she certainly has been very kind to me," Adrienne observed.

"Dot ish right, my tear, always speak well of der bridge dot carries you over!" the professor exclaimed, with a wise shake of his shaggy head.

"Und, now, my tear, we will come down to der business, if you please."

"Yes."

"Hafe you der moosic fer der songs dot you vill sing?"

"No, I haven't any music," Miss Richmond replied. "You see, I did not come to Golden Plume with the expectation of doing anything of this sort."

"Ah, yes; vell, it does not matter. I am up in all der songs mit der day. I hafe been playing mit der variety shops for der ten last years, so if you please tell me der names of der songs dot you will sing, you vill see how quick I vill blay dem for you. You sing by ther ear?"

"No, by note."

"Ah, yesh, all der ladies mit der variety business dey sing by der note, but sometimes der notes dot dey do sing and der notes dot I do blay do not agree at all, und dot ish because I do not der violin understand, pretty well, already," and the professor grinned as though he considered that he had said a good thing.

"You mean that they pretend to sing by note, when really they cannot, and when you play the music as it is written they cannot sing it?" Miss Richmond observed, with a knowing smile.

"If I vas to say to Lily Davenport dot she could not sing by note she vould me kill as dead as never vas!"

"Is it possible?"

"Oh, yesh, und 'bout all dose variety womans are der same. Dere ish not one out of ten dot knows one note of moosic from anodder!" the violinist asserted, with an air of great disgust.

"It vas too funny for anything to see dem variety womans who would not know one of der notes of moosic und dey fell over dem in der dark, put on der big frills, as de American mans say, when dey come to rehearse dose songs."

"Mister Leader if you please to blay dot song in dot key, which ish der key I sing in always," I say, 'Yaw, yaw, I blay him just as you say,' den I starts off mid de key and the womans strikes annodder, and den vhen der troubles comes she cries, Ach, himmel! Mister Leader, vhy do you not blay der moosic as I tells you?"

"They know so little of music that they are not able to tell whether you are playing correctly or not, eh?" Miss Richmond said, laughing.

"Dot ish it!" the German replied with a grave shake of his ponderous head. "At first I vas not smart, und I would der woomans tell dot der moosic she did not know."

"And then she was highly offended, I suppose?"

"Oh, yesh, but now when der womans say I sing der song in such a key, I say, 'Oh, yes, my tear, I will play it for you,' und den I let der womans begin und I follow her, so it does not

matter v'at key she sings der song in, I am all right mit her, und if she takes it into her great head to sing every verse in a different key den I am all right too, und she smiles so sweetly at me as never vas, und say I vas der best leader dot can be found in der gountry, already!"

Adrienne laughed in her merry, light-hearted way.

"Ah, professor, it is evident that you are a gay deceiver," she declared.

"Vell, vell, I must something do to get der bread und butter," he replied. "Und if I vas to blay der moosic as she ish written, den der womans could not sing at all."

"You will find that I am an exception to the rule, for I was lucky enough to receive a good musical education," Miss Richmond remarked. "And though you may consider that I am boasting yet I assure you that I am always able to sing the music as it is written."

"Dot is goot, und it vill not be so mooch troubles for me. Und now v'at vill you sing?"

"Do you know the drinking-song from the opera of the Enchantress, 'Tis the sparkle of champagne?"

The professor looked surprised.

"Ach Himmel!" he exclaimed, "dot ish not v'ot I expected. You sings a song from der opera, hey?"

"Yes, do you know the work?"

"I t'ink not."

"Listen!" and then Miss Richmond hummed the air.

The German stuck his head on one side, paid strict attention for a few moments, and then a smile came over his broad face.

"Ah, yesh, yesh! dot I know!" then he played the air upon his violin, and she sung the words, but went through the performance in the peculiar, mechanical way common to the well-trained singer when rehearsing.

When the song was finished the professor nodded his head with an air indicative of great satisfaction.

"Dot ish goot!" he exclaimed. "You are von artist, und it is a pleasure to blay for you, but do you t'ink dose miners vill dot song like?"

"Oh, yes," Adrienne replied, carelessly, as though it was a matter of perfect indifference to her whether the song pleased or not. "And now, do you know the 'Silver Line'?"

"Ah, yesh," and then he played the popular air.

As before, she went through the words of the song, but without trying to give any particular expression to it; the professor though was too old, and too good a musician not to understand that she could give expression if she chose to do so. It was not because she could not, but because she did not care to sing as she would do if before an audience.

"Von t'ing ish sure, my tear," the professor remarked, shaking his head in a thoughtful way. "Dose songs vill be new to der poys. Dey hafe not been sung to death like der 'Full Moon,' 'Vite Vings,' and t'ings of dot sort."

"Yes, I had an idea that they would be fresh to these miners, although they are not new, particularly the one from the opera of the Enchantress, which is older than I am."

"And now let me see: how many songs do I need to sing?"

"Dot Davenport womans sings t'ree," the German replied. "Two turns, and t'ree songs each turn. You see, der beoples come in und stay for an hour or so, und den dey go away und new beoples come in for der last of der show."

"Ah, yes, I understand. Have any of the airs from the Grand Duchess been sung by Miss Davenport?"

"Oh, no, she sings nothing but der regular serio-comic songs."

"Do you know 'The Sabre of Mon Pere?' and Adrienne sung the first few notes of the favorite air of the dashing ruler of the German Duchy."

"Ach, Himmel, yes!" And the professor played the lively song with wonderful spirit, while Miss Richmond hummed the words.

"Ah, yes, that will do nicely, and now, as soon as you finish the air, go right into this as a sort of a wind-up," Adrienne laughed as she spoke, and then she hummed a few notes which made the professor grin.

"Mine goodness! dot ish somet'ing new," he exclaimed.

"Oh, no, it is something very old," she replied, with a smile.

"Ah, yesh, I know dot, but v'at I means is dot it ish new here; but I do not der t'ing understand," the German remarked. "Hafe you vords which you vill sing to der music?"

"Oh, no, it is only as a sort of a wind-up to take me off the stage," Adrienne explained, and then she laughed again.

"Ah, yesh, I see," and the professor nodded his big head sagely. "I t'ink you vill get along all right."

"Well, I will try and do my best to please the audience. More than that mortal cannot do," Miss Richmond remarked.

"Oh, you will do; you are an artist, although you hafe not got an attack of der big head; but I can see dot you know v'at you are apout!" and with this declaration the professor took his departure.

CHAPTER XIV.
BOWERS'S IDEA.

AFTER the rehearsal began in the parlor the strains of music which floated out on the air to the street attracted the attention of the people who passed and almost every one stopped to listen for a moment or two.

Among the rest was the veteran bummer, Joe Bowers, and he cocked his head on one side and listened with the air of a man who knew a good thing when he heard it.

It was the strains from the Grand Duchess music which reached Bowers's ears, and the fact rather surprised him.

"Well, now, this is kinder elevating!" he remarked. "I wonder how the boys will take to the opera style? I am a little afraid that it will be too rich for their blood, and a nice mess Lily Davenport will be apt to make of it, that is, when compared to the gay and gorgeous creatures that I have seen fling themselves in the Grand Duchess."

Just as the veteran came to the end of his reflections the landlord made his appearance with a painted billboard, similar to the one already in position in front of the saloon, and this new announcement Bozain placed by the side of the other.

Bowers read the proclamation aloud.

"Great attraction! The queen of serio-comic, Miss Adrienne Richmond to-night. First appearance. Be on hand! Well, you have got something new, eh?"

Bozain looked askance at the bummer; Bowers was a stranger and his appearance did not strike the landlord favorably.

Bowers being a remarkably shrewd fellow guessed at once the thoughts that were in the mind of the other.

"Oh, it is all right, me sportive tricks!" he exclaimed, with a dignified wave of his fat hand. "You don't know me, of course, but I am all wool and a yard wide! One of the kind of white men that it is safe to tie to; and when it comes to a little funny business of this kind, why, you couldn't strike a man for a thousand square miles who would be able to give you the good old solid advice that I kin put forth!"

"Is that so?" the landlord asked in an extremely doubtful way.

"Oh, you kin bet all your wealth it is!" Bowers cried with great dignity. "Say! didn't you never hear tell of the Theater Royal in Grass Valley that I run?"

"No, I never did."

"Then you are doomed, like an ill-roasted egg, all on one side!" the bummer cried, and he shook his head in a very grave way.

"What in thunder are you talking about, anyway?" exclaimed Bozain, mystified.

"Only a little speech outen a play," Bowers explained. "I tell you what it is, me royal nibs, I am jest the kind of fakir you ought to get a hold of! Oh! couldn't I jest boom yer old show if I went into the business?"

"Why don't you?" Bozain inquired with a grin, for he fancied he would bother the loud-spoken stranger if he took him at his word.

"You wouldn't give me a chance, I reckon," Joe Bowers observed, loftily.

"Yes, I would!" the landlord declared. "You kin hop right in to-night if you like. But what kin you do? Are you a comic singer?"

"Nary time! I'm no performer—I'm a manager, I am!" the bummer declared with great dignity.

"A manager!" Bozain exclaimed, surveying the other from head to foot.

"You bet! and I am a hustler from Hustler-ville, too!"

"I reckon that you are in hard luck jest now though."

"Oh, no, don't you make the mistake of thinking you kin tell anything 'bout a man by sizing up his harness! 'Tis not alone me inky cloak, good mother!" Joe Bowers exclaimed, striking an attitude.

"Well, I don't see how you kin do anything for me."

"Why, I kin boom yer show around the camp," the veteran exclaimed. "Now, you have got a new performer coming on to-night. This hyer little bill is all right; it will tell the galoots who happen to come along this way that you have something new on to-night."

"Yes, that is my calculation."

"But what 'bout the men who don't go by?" the veteran asked. "They won't know anything about it, you know."

"Wal, I s'pose not," the landlord responded, scratching his head in a thoughtful way.

"Cert!" Joe Bowers exclaimed, "you kin bet your ducats on that and you would win every time! Now suppose you had a man 'bout my size—a galoot who kin sling good United States talk equal to any two-legged cuss in all this broad land—who would make it his business to sail round this hyer camp, and the mines in the neighborhood, and blow for the show—g'n'em this kind of a lay-out: 'Boys, you jest ought to take in the Metropolitan to-night! I would rather have a thousand dollars in my pocket than to miss it! The big-hearted cuss w'ot runs the concern has got on the biggest kind of a show—you jest ought to see this new gal, this Miss Adrienne Richmond! Oh, you kin bet all

yer wealth that she takes the hull bakery every time! She's away up at the top of the heap, and they do say that the last time she sung afore the Sultan of Turkey the old Turk slung her a diamond as big as a walnut! Oh, I tell you, boyees, you will jest miss it if you don't waltz into the Metropolitan to-night!" Thar, how does that strike you?" the bummer asked, with great dignity.

"Wal, I reckon that some gas of that kind might pull a few of the chaps into the show who wouldn't be apt to come," the landlord replied.

"In course! Thar is not a doubt 'bout it!" Joe Bowers declared. "You kin bet that I could rope in twenty or thirty extra every night. Say twenty, 'cos I believe in putting the figures down low," and the veteran proceeded to count on his fingers. "Twenty men, three drinks apiece on the average, mebbe four; wal, it is safe to reckon on a dollar a head, twenty dollars a night, and that is jest what I would be worth to you to boom the show!"

"Oh, no, no!" exclaimed the landlord, shaking his head vigorously in dissent. "You are away off; you wouldn't git no sich sum as that in addition to my regular custom, and thar ain't no mistake about it!"

"Well, now, a pint of this hyer kind is not easily decided," Joe Bowers remarked. "But one thing is sart'in, and that is, I kin do you a heap of good. Of course it ain't possible for me, or you, or anybody else, for to say jest exactly how much good I could do your shebang, but there is no mistake but what I could help trade by hustling round town and doing a big heap of blowing for the show."

"I reckon you could help the thing along a little, but, as you say, it ain't possible for any one to tell how much," Bozain observed.

"S'pose you give me a chance, and then you will be able to see jest what I kin do," Joe Bowers suggested.

"Yes, I might do that, but the pint is how much do you want—what kind of an arrangement do you reckon to make?"

"Well, I tell you, seeing that it is you, and that you are jest the kind of man I think it is safe to tie to, I will make you a good, squar' offer. I will boom the show 'way up to the mines for free drinks!" the veteran exclaimed, with the air of a man who thought he was conferring a favor.

The landlord surveyed Joe Bowers from top to toe for a moment, and there was a look on his face as though he was making a mental calculation as to how much liquor the veteran would be able to stand, then he shook his head.

"Say! I don't want to hurt your feelings, as you are a stranger to me," the landlord remarked. "But it is my idee that if I was to make any such bargain with you, I would get a deal the worst of it, for you look like a man who kin git away with a heap of liquor."

The veteran bummer grinned as though he considered that he had been greatly complimented.

"Mighty satrap! I reckon that you have managed to hit me 'bout where I live!" he declared. "I am willing to own up, right away, that I kin punish my share of lick."

"I don't doubt it!" Bozain exclaimed. "And I reckon that if I agreed to give you all the drinks you wanted, I would come out of the little end of the horn."

"Then you don't keer to go inter the thing on that basis?" the veteran remarked, thoughtfully.

"No, I don't! There's no money in it for me."

"S'pose we fix a limit on the drinks," the other suggested. "And there is another thing you must take into consideration, too, and that is that when a champion bug-juice h'ister like myself waltzes up to the bar, he allers takes his fluid with sich a relish—sich an air of 'Ah! if this ain't the very best oh-be-joyful that I ever tasted I wish I may be jiggered!' that every galoot in the room will feel a mad desire to rush up to the counter and take a drink too, 'cos men are jest like a lot of geese, whar one goose goes the rest come tailing on arter."

The landlord could not help admitting that there was a deal of truth in this statement; still, he declared he was afraid that it would not work well enough in his business to admit of his "banking" heavily upon it.

"Of course, there is no telling how a thing of this kind will always work," the veteran observed. "A man has got to take chances. But if you ain't inclined to play me without a limit, s'pose you set one. How many drinks a day kin you stand? How does ten strike you? Jest try it for one day, you know—to-day, say—to see how it goes, and then if it don't pan out all right you kin stop."

The landlord thought that this was a fair offer, and immediately accepted, and then stood treat to bind the bargain.

The veteran departed to "wake up the camp," as he expressed it, and he certainly worked in the most faithful manner, for he managed to borrow a horse, and on the back of the animal visited every mine within five miles of Golden Plume, and the way he "blowed" in regard to the attractions of the new star of the Metropolitan was really wonderful, and the result was

that when night came the saloon held a bigger crowd than had ever before congregated within its walls.

CHAPTER XV.

ADRIENNE APPEARS.

JOE BOWERS had stationed himself by the end of the bar near where the landlord stood so as to be able to talk to him.

The saloon did an extra good business, and the rush of customers at one time was so great that the landlord was obliged to help the bartender.

"W'at do you think of this hyer?" Joe Bowers demanded in exultation. "Don't this hyer gang piling in look as if I had done you some good?"

The landlord was forced to admit that it was more than probable.

"But it is the first night of Miss Richmond," he added. "And, of course, when a new performer comes on it always makes some difference."

"Oh, yes, but if I hadn't puffed the gal from A to amper and the heft of the gang would not have had their curiosity excited and you kin bet they would not have been so anxious to see w'ot she was like."

Bozain agreed that this was probable.

"And, say, thar is another pint I was going to touch on, and that is that your Dutchman when he announces the performers don't put on fancy touches enuff," the veteran declared. "All he says is the name of the performer, instead of giving out that they are jest the very kings and queens of creation in their particular lines."

"Oh, well, he does the best he can," the landlord replied. "You must remember that he is not a native and he can't sling good United States talk as well as he might."

"If I had the togs now I reckon I could make the gang open their eyes and stare with wonder!" the veteran exclaimed. "But I am one of the galoots w'ot never feels easy when I have good harness on. In old duds, like this hyer uniform of mine, I am at home, and if I feel like taking a snooze in a corral shed, or any other place of the kind, I kin bunk right down and not be skeered of hurting anything."

"Well, I reckon that you couldn't hurt your clothes much," Bozain assented.

The conversation was interrupted at this point by the appearance of the professor, who, violin in hand, took his seat before the rude music-stand which stood on the floor at the right hand of the little stage.

This was the signal that the performance was about to begin, and a hush fell upon the audience.

The entertainment commenced with a "nigger act," introducing the banjoist and the comic singer.

When the "turn" was ended, the professor announced:

"Now, gentlemen, der valter vill go round mid der hat, und you must gife v'at you can for der poys!"

After this ceremony was performed Lily Davenport made her appearance, and as she was a favorite, was greeted with considerable applause.

She was anxious to please to-night, and exerted herself more than usual, for she was afraid that the new-comer, although nothing but an amateur, might prove to be a dangerous rival, and she did not wish to be outshone on the stage where she had been the bright particular star.

The bat was passed around for Mrs. Davenport's benefit, and then the banjoist appeared, and after his act was finished, curiosity was on tip-toe, for the miners conjectured that the next to appear would be the new star, and every neck was craned to see, when the professor announced:

"Miss Adrienne Richmond!"

The performers were equally as anxious to behold the debut of the new-comer as the audience, and were all gathered in the side scenes, where they could command a view of the stage.

Adrienne was dressed, ready to go on, before the performance commenced; she sat in the "wings," and watched the various acts until her time came to appear, apparently not at all anxious about the ordeal.

But the performers shook their heads sagely, and whispered to each other, "Wait till she faces the footlights, and see if it don't knock her cold!"

They fancied that her confidence came from inexperience; she did not comprehend how difficult was the task she had undertaken, and when she came in front of the glittering lights and saw the sea of heads, with every eye fixed upon her, she would become a prey to that strange fear which is called stage-fright, and its victims when attacked, stand trembling before the audience, unable to utter a single word.

Lily Davenport though did not agree with the others.

"The girl has cheek enough to carry her through, even if she never faced the footlights before!" she declared.

"You just mark my words: she will get through all right, though she is not able to sing a note correctly."

And the woman was far wiser than her brother performers, as events proved.

When the time came for Adrienne to make her appearance, she seemed to be transformed suddenly into another being.

All her listlessness disappeared and she advanced to the footlights with a dashing, taking way that immediately won the good opinion of the audience, even before she opened her mouth.

The performers stared in amazement; never in all their experience had they beheld an amateur make such an entrance, for the most capable old-stager could not have done it better.

And great was the curiosity of the professionals in regard to what she would sing.

They had tried to cross-examine the professor, but the old German was just cranky enough not to gratify their curiosity.

"You wait long enough, you see for yourself, mebbe," he replied.

And when the professor played the opening bars of the air, it was not familiar to them, for none of the performers were acquainted with the old-time opera.

"The Vintage of Champagne" is a charming song when well sung, and Adrienne Richmond sung the air to perfection. Her voice was magnificent; any one who understood music in connection with the human voice could see that it had been most carefully cultivated, and the young woman had been taught how to use it to the best advantage.

She sung with both fire and expression, "acted" the song too as well as sung it, and when at the close of the first verse she produced a tiny wine glass, which she held concealed in her handkerchief, and flourished it in the air, the audience signified their approval by a tremendous burst of applause, which the fair singer received with an air which seemed to say that while she appreciated the compliment yet she was conscious of being worthy of it.

When the end of the song came Adrienne retreated from the stage, while the miners yelled at the top of their lungs and stamped on the floor with their heavy boots until the landlord began to be alarmed lest the boards should give way under the pressure.

Miss Richmond came smilingly back and sang the "Silver Line" as no one in the apartment had ever heard it sung before, and when she had concluded, the audience yelled and stamped until she again appeared.

This time she gave them the famous air from the Grand Duchess, "The Sabre of Mon Pere," and as the miners shouted their delight, at the end, to the astonishment of all, the violinist played the can-can, and Adrienne, lifting her skirts daintily just above the top of her boots, danced for a minute, as the characters dance in the Grand Duchess at the end of the act; not the high-kicking, vulgar can-can which Americans know under that name, but lively, graceful French measure, which is no more offensive when rightly danced than the common fancy dances.

The audience fairly went wild.

Amid a perfect hurricane of applause Adrienne faced the footlights again, and she held up her little hand as if to impose silence.

The miners quieted down immediately.

"I hope, my friends, that you are satisfied with my humble efforts to please you," she said, with one of the sweet smiles which she knew so well how to render captivating.

"Yes, yes, yes!" came in a perfect roar from all parts of the room.

"I am glad of that, for I hope to remain a little while in Golden Plume, and it is pleasant to the artist to know that she is appreciated. And, now, professor, the last verse and the dance, please, and after that I shall have to ask you to excuse me, for I shall try my best to please you, and if you want to excite me to my greatest efforts, don't forget to see the hat when it goes around!"

And this injunction was delivered with such archness that it made the miners roar with delight.

Then she repeated the last verse of the song and the dance which was fully as well received as before, then Adrienne ran, laughingly, off the stage amid cheers of approval.

As soon as the miners settled down the waiter started with the hat.

And just at this moment Keen Billy thought that it was time he did something to help his fair ally along.

He occupied a seat in the front row, close to where the waiter stood by the professor's side, and as the man started with the hat, Keene jumped to his feet, and exclaimed in a tone loud enough to be heard by every one in the room.

"I want to be the first man to put a dollar in that hat!"

Then, suiting the action to the word, he cast a silver dollar into the article.

The sport was acting on Joe Bowers's notion, that men were like geese and prone to imitate.

The veteran bummer, who was standing by the wall, some ten feet in the rear of the sharp, was quick to detect the game that the other was playing, and prompt to "chip in" to help him.

"I want to be the second man to put a dollar in that ere hat!" he yelled out, and diving his hand into his pocket he started forward; as the passageway was blocked he tried to push through the miners, but they were not inclined to give way.

"Hold on, old man!" cried one.

"Keep your place and wait till the hat comes 'round to you!" exclaimed another.

"You are away behind the lighter, anyway!" declared a third, "for two or three are ahead of you now!"

This was the truth, for some of the men in the front row had been spurred on by Joe Bowers's declaration to cast their coins into the hat.

The veteran grumblingly declared that it was a shame, and that he would rather have given five dollars than have been deprived of the opportunity of being the second man to chip in.

Owing to this start, as well as the fact that the girl had really made a great success, the coins tumbled into the hat in a lively manner, for really every man in the place felt like giving something, and the waiter grinned with delight as he started for the stage with his spoils.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE SERIO-COMIC SPEAKS.

THE stage department was so arranged that the ladies had a dressing-room on one side and the gentlemen on the other.

When Adrienne quitted the stage she went directly to the dressing-room and, sinking into a chair, helped herself to a glass of water.

Lily Davenport followed, leaned against the door-post and regarded her intently.

Miss Richmond looked at Mrs. Davenport and smiled, with a shy look in her eyes.

"I got along all right, you see," she said, demurely.

"Yes, I should say you did!" Lily Davenport exclaimed in a very sarcastic way.

"But I suppose that it is an easy matter to please an audience of this kind," Adrienne remarked, reflectively.

"Oh, very easy!" and the sarcastic tone deepened.

"If I had been in a regular theater, in a large city, where the audience are used to seeing the best of everything, perhaps I would not have got along so well," and the girl shook her head as if she had some serious doubts in regard to this matter.

"Oh, come now, don't try to fool me!" Lily Davenport exclaimed. "For you cannot do it and you are only wasting your breath!"

"Why, what do you mean?" And Miss Richmond looked at the serio-comic in a very innocent way.

"Just as if you did not know!" the other exclaimed with a fine touch of scorn.

"Well, if you will take the trouble to explain I will surely understand then."

"In the first place you are no amateur!"

"Ah, you are kind enough to say that because I have been fortunate enough to please the audience."

"Not at all! I would have said the same thing if you hadn't got a hand of applause!" Lily Davenport declared in a very decided way.

"Why, I am satisfied that you would have scored a success if there had not been ten people in the house!"

"Now you are flattering me!" Adrienne exclaimed with her lips wreathed in smiles.

"Oh, no, I am only speaking the truth. I can tell you, young lady, that I have been too long on the boards to make a mistake; I know an actress when I see one. You are no amateur but a regular professional and a high grade one at that too!"

"Compliment on compliment!"

"Truth! nothing but the truth!" the other cried, firmly. "Why, I could see that you knew perfectly well what you were about the moment you struck the stage, and when you advanced to the footlights with that peculiar swing of yours I was certain that you would catch the audience for all they were worth! There is not one woman in a hundred who can do the trick! I know what I am talking about by sad experience, for I have tried to put on style of that kind myself, but, somehow, I cannot do it. I suppose that it is something that must come natural, and cannot be taught."

"I suppose so, for most assuredly I have never tried to be anything but what I am."

"And what a musician you are, too!" Mrs. Davenport exclaimed. "I am not a first-class musician myself by any manner of means, although I will admit that I am not generally willing to own up that I am not, for it is my bread and butter to make people believe that I am, but I know enough to understand that I cannot hope to deceive an artist like yourself."

"Ah, now you are flattering me again," Adrienne exclaimed, shaking her uplifted finger archly at the other.

"You know better than that," Mrs. Davenport declared. "Why, it was really a sight to watch Dutchy's face while you were singing. That Dutchman is a little crazy on music, you know, and I could see from the expression on his countenance that your singing was a regular treat to him."

"I am glad of that."

"And I will admit that it was a treat to me, too, for I dearly love music, although I cannot boast that I was ever thoroughly trained in it, but I will tell you what I will do—I'll give you half of all I make if you can only teach me to sing one-half as well as you do!"

"I will be glad to do all I can for you, but I fear you overrate my abilities."

"Oh, no, I don't! But I understand, of course, that it may not be possible for me to learn. The smartest teacher cannot make a prima donna out of a woman if she hasn't got the talent in her, and I do not really believe that I have. But there is one thing I guess you can do, and that is to teach me to dance in that nice way that you have."

"Why, you can have no idea how astonished I was when Dutchy struck up the can-can! I said to myself, 'It cannot be possible that she intends to dance that—it would be altogether too risky!' But I never saw anybody dance it as you did, and you were just as modest as modest could be. By the way, isn't it the new skirt-dancing, as they call it, that some of the English girls have introduced?"

"Yes, something of that style."

"Well, I thought so when you were dancing. I have heard of the new style, but had no idea of what it was like, but it is just splendid, and I do not wonder that the audience fairly went wild over it."

"Well, I am quite willing to teach you to the best of my ability," Adrienne remarked. "And I shall not charge you anything either. You were obliging enough to help me, and you had no idea that I would be able to return the favor; it was all pure kindness on your part, and I am very glad to be able to do something for you."

"I guess that your heart is in the right place," Lily Davenport exclaimed, impulsively, and then she advanced to the side of the young girl, put her arm around her neck and kissed her on the cheek.

"Well, I hope that it is," Miss Richmond replied. "But whether it is or not, one thing is certain, and that is I am not apt to forget any one who is kind to me."

"Oh, I do not doubt that! Nor are you the kind of girl to either forget or forgive an injury either. I did not make any mistake about you, for it was my first impression that despite your innocent, artless way, you were nobody's fool, and could be depended upon to take care of yourself."

"Yes, I believe that is the truth," Adrienne admitted.

"I know it is!" the other declared. "This performance of yours to-night confirms me in my belief, but I must say that it is a mystery to me why you choose to masquerade as an amateur, or how you happened to come to this jumping off place of creation."

"It was just by accident," Miss Richmond replied. "I came here expecting to meet a certain party, and upon my arrival was astonished to find that he had gone away without leaving any message or instructions for me. I had not calculated upon any accident of this kind happening and so was abruptly thrown upon my own resources. As it happened I had no money to speak of, and if the idea had not come to me that I might be able to make something by appearing in this place I don't know what I would have done."

"You will do well enough now, for you have made a hit, and can safely calculate upon getting five or six dollars a night," Lily Davenport said. "I have got two and a half already, and on my second time I will be pretty sure to pick up a dollar more. The second time generally pans out about half what the first one does, for only the new-comers chip in, and there are not many of them."

"Judging from the amount of applause that I received, I ought to reap a good harvest."

"I would not be afraid to give you eighteen or twenty dollars for your first rake!" Mrs. Davenport declared.

"Do you think it will be as much as that?"

"My estimate is under the mark! I got fifteen dollars on my first night, and though I scored a success, yet the audience did not go wild about me as they did about you to-night."

"Well, I hope that your opinion will prove to be correct, for I am sadly in need of money," Miss Richmond observed in a thoughtful way.

"And, Mrs. Davenport, you can do me a favor if you feel inclined."

"Certainly! I shall be glad to, for I have taken a liking to you, although I know that you are dreadfully deep," the other replied, promptly.

"It is that you will not tell any one that you think I am deep, or that I have ever appeared on the stage before. I have good reasons, I assure you, for asking this favor."

"Oh, that is all right. I will keep my opinions to myself, and as to your reasons, it is none of my business."

The appearance of the grinning waiter at this point interrupted the conversation.

He emptied the money into Miss Richmond's lap and then retreated.

It was a windfall indeed, for there was exactly thirty-one dollars.

"And you will get five or ten more next time!" Lily Davenport exclaimed.

And her guess was correct, for Adrienne's second appearance was as successful as her first, and nine dollars were added to her gains.

After the performances ended it was the universal opinion that it was the best show that the Metropolitan had ever given, and the landlord was delighted at the lucky stroke of fortune.

CHAPTER XVII.

A CONFERENCE.

It was about half-past ten when the show at the Metropolitan came to an end, and as Keene came to the front of the saloon he encountered Joe Bowers.

The veteran was in the best of spirits; he had succeeded in getting through the evening on five drinks, so still had five to his credit, as he remarked to the sport, after he explained to him the particulars of the bargain which he had made with mine host of the Metropolitan.

Keene was amused by the novel idea and remarked that he thought it was a genuine stroke of genius, then the thought came to him that as he wanted to take a look at the bruiser, Bendigo, it would be a good idea to take Bowers with him so as to get the opinion of the veteran in regard to the boxer's capabilities.

He suggested the visit to Bowers and that worthy approved of it at once.

"You are right, me noble dook!" the veteran bummer exclaimed. "There is where you are wise. The man who knows w'ot is w'ot don't take no more chances than he kin help. This is a mighty onsart'in world, and the man who plays a sure thing whenever he kin get a cinch on it is bound to come out on the top of the heap, and don't you forget it!"

The two then repaired to the Royal Gin Palace.

"I sized the fellow up before I made the match," Keene remarked to his companion on the way. "And if I had not been satisfied that I stood a good chance of getting away with him I would not have gone into the scheme."

"That is where your head was level!" Joe Bowers observed with an approving nod.

"And now that the match is made I have a curiosity to see if the man is taking any care of himself. I have been told that, as a rule, the fellow gets full nearly every night, and a man who indulges in liquor by the wholesale has no business to go into a fight."

"Nary time!" Joe Bowers declared, emphatically. "And if the man ain't taking care of himself it shows that he ain't got no sense, but then there is a lot of these would-be big chiefs who make mistakes of that kind, and from what I have seen of this galoot I should say he war jest the man to reckon that he had an easy job on hand and so make a fool of himself."

"That is about the opinion I have of him," the sport remarked.

By this time they had arrived at the saloon of the Englishman.

The place was well filled with patrons when they entered, for the Royal Gin Palace was the principal gambling-house of the town.

Bendigo was in his accustomed place behind the bar, and at the first glance the pair saw that the bruiser had been drinking heavily.

After the two entered Bendigo became engaged in a "chaffing" match with a miner who ventured to inquire if he wasn't "a leetle skeered of Long Hank's Unknown?"

"Oh, yes, I am awfully skeered!" the bruiser replied, with a sneer. "And I kin just tell you that if they didn't tie me in bed every night, I would be sure to cut my lucky and git out before morning!" And then Bendigo laughed loudly at his joke, his admirers joining in the merriment.

Keene and Joe Bowers only remained for a few minutes and then withdrew, having satisfied their curiosity.

"The galoot ain't letting up any," the veteran remarked.

"No, he evidently thinks he has an easy snap, and that it is not worth while for him to take any trouble."

"So much the better for you!" Joe Bowers declared.

"Yes, no doubt about that. It will make my work easier. If the man had taken care of himself I should have my hands full. As it is, I think I will be able to handle him without much trouble."

"I'm mighty glad that I have got a line onto this thing, for it will give me a chance to pull in some ducats," the veteran remarked, with a chuckle. "The miners are so confident that this hyer Bobby Bendigo will have a walk-over, that they are jest crazy to put their money on him, and so are willing to give long odds, which gives a man a chance to pick up a heap of money on a small investment."

"The town is all at sea in regard to the Unknown, and as it is the general impression that there isn't a man in the camp who stands any chance with the bruiser, the men are anxious to bet on him."

"Mebbe they will know more arter the picnic is over," the veteran observed, with a grin, and then the two parted.

The sport proceeded to the hotel and went to

bed, where he slept as sleeps the man whose mind is free from care.

He was up early in the morning, went to the restaurant, got his breakfast, and then proceeded to the parlor, his idea being to get speech with Miss Richmond.

Contrary to the usual custom of the stage people she was an early riser, and came down to breakfast while the sport was at the table, and after Keene reached the parlor he only had to wait a short time for Adrienne to appear.

"Allow me to congratulate you upon your success last night," the sport said, as the girl entered and bade him "good-morning."

"Thank you," she replied, as she seated herself. "I hoped to be able to make a success, but the result exceeded my anticipation."

"Really, you have great talents in that line," the sport remarked. "I have always been a great theater-goer, and so am qualified to judge."

"Yes, my appearance was a success, and I got much more money from the audience than I expected, but I fancy I am a little indebted to you in regard to that, for the performers told me about one of the audience spurring on the rest by crying out that he wanted to be the first man to put a dollar in the hat, and it was their opinion that this declaration contributed materially to the success of the collection."

"And you jumped to the conclusion that I was the man, eh?" Keene remarked, with a quiet smile.

"Yes, for I feel satisfied that you are desirous of aiding me, and you are shrewd enough to understand that in a case of this kind men are like sheep, inclined to follow a leader."

"I was the party, and I did go on that idea," the sport admitted.

"You place me under obligations which I will try to cancel as soon as I can!" Adrienne declared, earnestly.

"Oh, don't worry yourself about that!" Keene exclaimed. "If you succeed in winning this fight you will be able to square all you will owe me without any trouble."

"Thanks to the success I made last night I shall have plenty of money to aid me," Adrienne remarked. "And without money in a struggle of this kind one is helpless."

"No doubt about that, and, by the way, I can give you a tip, as the boys say, whereby you can add to your gains," the sport declared, an idea having come to him. And then he proceeded to explain about the boxing match.

"The odds are two to one on the Englishman," he said in conclusion. "And if you bet twenty-five or thirty dollars you stand a good chance of doubling your money, for the Unknown is going to win, bar accidents."

Adrienne fixed her brilliant eyes upon the speaker.

"Are you the Unknown?" she asked, abruptly.

"Yes, but you are not to give it away, you know."

"Oh, you need not fear to trust to my discretion!" Miss Richmond replied. "But I suspected the truth when I heard the performers talking about the matter last night and listened to their conjectures as to who Long Hank's Unknown would turn out to be."

"And you came to the conclusion that you knew the secret?"

"Yes, for I was aware of how easily you got the best of the driver when he objected to your going in the stage, and it was not difficult for me to guess that your prowess on that occasion had caused him to believe you would be more than a match for this Englishman."

"Well, unless I have made a great mistake I shall be as successful in my enterprise as you were in yours last night, and so, as I said, there is a chance for you to double all the money you can put on this affair," the sport advised.

"The best way will be for you to see Long Hank and give the money to him to bet for you."

"I will do so."

"If I win—and to my thinking, the chances are a hundred to one that I will—I shall be in funds, and as you will pull in money steadily here, in a week or so we will be able to go ahead in this fight without fear of not being able to carry it on for lack of funds."

"Yes, that is all that has troubled me, for I have felt sure that if we had money enough to back us we would surely succeed in bringing to the light all the particulars of the foul crime which I am certain has been committed!" Adrienne declared.

"I have been thinking over the matter, and have come to the conclusion that it would be better for me to go to White Oaks in person and see a lawyer, rather than to write."

Miss Richmond reflected upon the matter for a few moments, and then she remarked:

"You would surely be able to accomplish more."

"That is my idea. I can get a horse and ride over without letting anybody know that I have left town, ascertain all the particulars, which will not take me long, and then return. I have no notion, mark you, that it is suspected by any parties in this town that I am trying to help

you, but I am going on the idea that the fact may be known and that we must keep our eyes open."

"Yes, I think you are wise to take that view of the matter," Adrienne observed, thoughtfully. "It is always best to be prepared for the worst."

"That is my idea. The man who is constantly on guard is not likely to be taken by surprise, and in a game of this kind it is not prudent to give away a single point."

"You are right," the girl assented.

"As soon as the contest is over and I rake in the battle-money, if I am lucky enough to win, and I would be willing to bet all the money I ever expect to get hold of in this life that I will come out ahead, I start for White Oaks. I will see you before I go, but until that time comes I will keep away for fear that some one may detect that we are consulting together."

"Yes, that will be the best. We must not arouse suspicion if it can be avoided."

This brought the interview to an end. The sport descended to the saloon, while Miss Richmond sought her apartment.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE UNKNOWN APPEARS.

THE news that Long Hank had backed an Unknown to stand up against the veteran bruiser, Bobby Bendigo, created a deal of excitement, and few men were there within twenty miles of Golden Plume who did not make arrangements so as to be able to come to the camp on the night of the fight, that they might take in the "picnic."

Betting ran strongly in favor of the Englishman, and great was the wonder of the miners that so shrewd a man as Long Hank was popularly supposed to be should make such a blunder as to "stack up" against such a chief as Bobby Bendigo.

The driver had to stand a deal of chaffing, but he took it all in good part.

"Mebbe I have made a mistake," he admitted, "but I am jest man enuff to keep right on in the same line. You fellers may think you kin scare me out of my boots, but that ar' thing ain't to be did as easy as you s'pose. I reckon that my man stands a chance to stay ten rounds with Bendigo, and if you galoots think that he can't do it, all you have to do is to put up your ducats, and you kin clean me out for I have jest sand enuff to back my man to the extent of my pile."

Long Hank spoke boldly enough, but when it came to making the bets the would-be backers of the Englishman discovered that the driver wanted two to one, and was not willing to put up his money on any other terms.

"You fellers have been making sich a big talk 'bout my not knowing what I was about, and you are so durned sure Bendigo is going to have a walk-over, that I have made up my mind I ought to have big odds if the chances are so much ag'in' my man!" he declared. "So, two to one, gents, is what I want, and if you are game to come up to the scratch at that figure I will cover all the money you kin scare up!"

This was regarded as a "bluff" on the part of Long Hank, and although the miners were confident that his Unknown stood no chance in the coming contest, yet they hesitated to bet at such odds, but when they found that the driver was firm in his position—"Two to one, or nary a bet do you get out of me!" he repeated persistently—they finally did business on that basis.

The Englishman and his friends were astonished when they found that the driver was really willing to back his man.

It was their idea that he had acted like a fool in making the match, and they had no notion he would be willing to bet any money upon the result, and when the miners came to the Royal Gin Palace to get a "tip," all the men in the place, from Liverpool Jack down to the meanest hanger-on, declared that it was a "dead sure cinch," the bruiser could not possibly lose.

Thus encouraged, the miners, who were fond of betting, proceeded to invest small sums upon the result.

Liverpool Jack and his friends set them an example by trying to bluff Long Hank. They did not think the driver was well-heeled, financially speaking, and they went on to bet him to a stand-still, but, to their astonishment, they were not able to accomplish this.

They had to put up two dollars to Long Hank's one, and as he had the Express agent at his back, he was able to stand the racket, much to the surprise of everybody.

On the night fixed for the contest to take place, there was the biggest crowd in Golden Plume which had ever been seen there.

The mystery which surrounded the affair had appealed powerfully to the imagination of the miners, for the secret had been well kept, and not a soul in the town outside of the getters-up of the affair had any idea of who was the man selected to contend with Bobby Bendigo.

It had been arranged that the fight was to take place in the Royal Gin Palace, and the price of admission had been fixed at a dollar a head.

The saloon was about thirty feet wide, so there was ample room to erect a regular twenty-

four-foot ring in the rear of the apartment, and in order to get all the spectators possible, the managers of the contest had arranged to have it take place at half-past ten in the evening, so that the Metropolitan crowd, as the patrons of that establishment were termed, would be able to attend without missing the variety show.

The performance of Miss Richmond was the talk of the camp, and as she was certain to draw a crowd, the managers of the fight thought it would be wise to arrange the matter so that the miners could "take in" both events.

Liverpool Jack held a consultation with the landlord of the Metropolitan in regard to the matter, and Bozain agreed to hurry his performance through so that it would be over by ten o'clock thus enabling his patrons to go to the boxing match.

An announcement to this effect was displayed on the outside of the hotel, and it did not take long for the news to spread around the town.

Golden Plume on this particular night held more people than had ever been in the town before. One would have thought that it was a holiday, for the camp wore a gala air.

Acquaintances button-holed each other, men were led into dark corners by other men, and the question put in the most mysterious manner:

"Say, hev you discovered who Long Hank's Unknown really is?"

But none could give any information on this point, and the people at large were utterly in the dark.

One of the results of this inflow of people was to crowd the Metropolitan saloon, and Adrienne repeated her success.

Her "act" was hailed with wild cheers of approval and the hat held five dollars more than it contained on her first appearance.

Before the performance commenced the actors had chatted about the boxing contest, and the banjo player, Billy Skidder, who was a melancholy sort of an individual in private life, declared his intention of betting on the Unknown.

"I have picked up a good bit of money in my time by betting on dark horses," he explained. "And when I kin git the odds of two to one I think it is safe to risk a trifle; then too I know that Long Hank is no fool, and I reckon he had his eyes peeled when he went into this thing, and from the way he is putting up the solid stuff anybody kin see that he isn't skeered. Why, I reckon the man has put up five hundred dollars!"

The remark afforded Adrienne the opportunity she sought. She had given all her money to Long Hank to bet on the contest, but had neglected to make any arrangements with him to take the cash she would receive after her performance was over, and so, pretending to be convinced by the banjo-player's words that it would be safe to bet on the Unknown, she asked him to take her money and bet it.

This favor Skidder readily granted, and after Miss Richmond got her cash, she turned it over to the banjo-player, much to Lily Davenport's astonishment.

"Well, I declare!" she exclaimed. "You are getting to be a regular sport!"

"Oh, it isn't that; I do not care anything about such contests, but I am anxious to make money, and it seems to me that this is a good chance," Adrienne explained.

"Well, I don't know about that," the other observed, doubtfully. "Judging from the way the men talk, this Unknown does not stand any chance, and you will only lose your money. The miners are not fools, you know; they would not bet two to one against the Unknown, if they thought he stood any chance to win."

"Yes, but as no one but the ones who are backing the Unknown can possibly know anything about him, don't you think that the men who are betting so largely against him are acting a little rashly?" Adrienne argued. "How can they tell anything about a man of whom they know nothing?"

Lily Davenport reflected over this problem for a few moments.

"Well, your argument seems to be good, but I suppose the idea is that the men in the camp all know each other, and if any man had a reputation as a boxer the rest would be aware of it, and so they feel sure that there isn't any one in the town who is a match for this Bendigo," Mrs. Davenport observed.

"Men sometimes do not make a boast of what they can do," Adrienne argued. "So it is not safe to go on that idea."

"Maybe so, but I would look a long while at my money before I would risk it in such a way!" Lily Davenport declared, and this ended the conversation.

The performance at the Metropolitan ended promptly at ten o'clock, and in a few minutes the saloon was about deserted, only a few men, who did not care for boxing-matches, remaining in the place to keep the bartender company.

Even the landlord had posted off to the Royal Gin Palace, anxious to secure a good place to see the contest.

At half-past ten the crowd surrounded the roped inclosure five deep.

Prompt to the minute Bobby Bendigo appeared in the ring in full fighting costume, stripped

to the waist, and wearing knee-breeches and stockings.

Liverpool Jack and his "bouncer" followed him to act as his seconds.

"Now, then, Hank, produce your cove!" the Englishman cried.

The driver and the Express agent stood together by the side of the ring.

"Wait a moment!" Long Hank ejaculated. "That's the referee and time-keeper to be selected first. I claim the right to keep back my man until the last minute."

"Well, I dunno 'bout that!" the Englishman exclaimed, with a shake of his big head.

"Oh, that is all right!" Bendigo cried, scornfully. "Give him all the time he wants! Can't you see that he is skeered, 'cos he knows I will knock out his blooming Unknown in short order when I git a chance to make a chopping-block out of him?" and the bruiser stretched out his big arms in a menacing way.

Bendigo was a brawny fellow, but a sporting expert, a good judge of men, would have decided at the first glance that he was in no condition to enter a contest of this sort.

He was old, stale and fat—his day had gone by; it is an old maxim that a man must be as "fit as a fiddle" to enter a boxing contest, for in no other form of athletic sport is it so important that a man should be in the best condition possible.

"All right! we'll fix the referee and time-keeper then," Liverpool Jack remarked.

A half a dozen men were proposed and objected to, first by one party and then by the other, before a choice was made.

Then it fell upon Jake Bozain, the landlord of the Metropolitan, and Andy Williams, the comic singer.

Bozain was known to be a square man, one who never bet, so he had no money on the match, and was well posted in regard to the rules which govern a contest of this kind.

Andy Williams too was well posted, and he was another man who did not bet.

Bozain and Williams took their places in the ring.

"Now, then, trot out yer Unknown!" Liverpool Jack cried.

And as soon as the demand was made Keen Billy threw his hat into the ring and then lightly leaped over the ropes to the astonishment of all.

CHAPTER XIX.

"A SURPRISE PARTY."

THE appearance of the sport in the ring astonished everybody, the two who were in the secret, the driver and the Express agent excepted.

Keene was a stranger to almost every one in the room, for he had kept very quiet since his advent in the town and made but few acquaintances.

There were two stools in the ring for the accommodation of the contestants, and Keene, after entering the ring seated himself upon one of them and began to remove his outer garment, amid a general hum of astonishment as miner whispered to miner, giving vent to their amazement. Long Hank and the Express agent got over the ropes.

When Keene's coat was off it was seen he wore no vest—that he had removed the fancy flannel shirt which he always wore, and only had on a flesh-colored undershirt, the sleeves of which were cut off at the elbow, and a belt of untanned leather girded in his waist.

An exclamation of surprise came from the lips of the bystanders as they gazed upon the muscular development of the sport, which was freely exposed by the skin-tight undershirt.

Keene was one of the men who "stripped large," as the sports say, and his appearance astonished all the beholders, and none more so than Liverpool Jack and his bruiser.

Both of them could boast of a deal of experience in ring matters and they were wise enough to see that the new-comer was no "dude chump," as they had at first believed when the gentlemanly-looking sport made his appearance in the ring.

"We hav'n't tossed for corners," Keene remarked. "But as there isn't any difference between them, this suits me very well if the other side is satisfied."

"Oh, yes, that is all right," Liverpool Jack observed, in a rather sulky way, for he was not at all pleased with the appearance of the "Unknown."

"Say, blow me tight! but this 'ere chap hain't wot I expected to see at h'all!" Bendigo exclaimed, in Liverpool Jack's ear.

"That is so," the other replied; "I'm blessed if that blamed Long Hank ain't rung in a blooming surprise party onto us!"

"But I kin do him, and don't you forget it!" the bruiser declared.

"Right you can!" Liverpool Jack assented. "You must go right in and smash 'im. There isn't one bout of a 'undred of these dude chaps wot has the sand to stand up to the rack and take their gruel like men if they git some blooming good punches!"

"You jest leave me alone! I will go in to walk all over him!" Bendigo declared.

"Now, gents, if you are ready we will go ahead with the procession!" Bozain announced,

"All ready!" Long Hank exclaimed, after exchanging a look with the sport.

"Ready and willing!" Liverpool Jack cried. Keene rose to his feet.

Then the bruiser tried the old-time dodge—the betting challenge to intimidate his opponent.

"I've got a hundred 'ere which I will put up ag'in' fifty that I best you!" Bendigo exclaimed, pulling out a roll of bills.

"I regret that I cannot accept your offer, but I haven't got the cash with me just at present," Keene replied.

This was the banjo-player's chance. As soon as he had washed off the black after his performance, he tried to find some one anxious to bet on Bendigo, but as it was late everybody whom he accosted had made their investments, so he was at the ring side with his money still in his pocket.

"I'll go you fifty!" Billy Skidder exclaimed, pulling out the money, which was in a small buckskin bag, and throwing it at Keene.

"Thanks!" cried the sharp, catching the bag with the deftness of a base-ball player.

Then the wager was made, the money being placed in Bozain's hands.

This accomplished, the landlord of the Metropolitan made a little speech, wherein he expressed his determination to see that the contest was conducted in a square manner, and that both men should have a "fair field and no favor."

This speech was received with general approbation.

Then from the lips of the landlord came the call, "Time!"

The contestants advanced and shook hands, after the custom common to the prize-ring, then separated and sparred for an opening.

And now that the two men stood opposed to each other in actual battle array the spectators were amazed to discover that there was so little difference between them in size.

It had been the general impression that the bruiser was by far the larger man.

He certainly was stouter than the other, but now that the opportunity for comparison was given, it was evident to all who were posted on such matters that Bendigo's extra weight was made up chiefly of fat, which could not help being to his disadvantage in a contest of this kind.

The sport was not as large boned, but he was more muscular than the other, and far better built in every way, and then to the eyes of the expert judges, and there were many such in the crowd, men who had been present at hard-fought battles, Keene seemed to be in splendid condition, just as if he had been in training for an encounter of this kind.

As the men sparred for an "opening" such a deep silence fell upon the assemblage that the drop of a pin would surely have been heard.

Before the antagonists had sparred for ten seconds the experts at this sort of thing, who were watching with anxious eyes, made up their minds that the unknown sport was no novice in the use of his fists; his position was an elegant one, he was much lighter on his feet than the Englishman, and evidently was going to be an extremely hard man to "get at."

Bendigo had tried twice to put in a blow, and each time the other had parried the stroke, and he had plainly made up his mind to act on the defensive for a while, for though he made two or three "offers" at the Englishman, it was evident to the boxing experts present that they were mere feints, designed to draw his opponent out.

Then Bendigo, losing patience, made a sudden rush at his man.

The sport retreated, and just as it looked likely that he would be caught in an ugly place on the ropes, he ducked under the arm of the Englishman, and as the other turned, Keene gave him an ugly lick under the ear, landing on the jugular vein, which made the big fellow wince.

Bendigo, rendered furious by the blow, started in to "rush" his opponent, but he got as good as he sent.

The Englishman reached the sport twice on the jaw, light blows, though, which did not seem to have any steam in them, as one of the boxing miners whispered to his companion, and in return he got the sport's right and left on the chest just under the heart, strokes which made the bruiser grunt with pain.

Then there was a clinch, in which Keene did some sharp infighting, amid great excitement, and cries of "Break! break!" from the referee.

The sport had played for the wind, and when the pair separated, Bendigo had "bellows to mend," and was puffing as though he had been in a foot-race.

Then, taking advantage of the confusion of his opponent, Keene "measured" his man and sent in a right-hander which seemed to take the bruiser between the eyes with the force of a pile-driver. Over he went on his back, coming down in a most clumsy way with a crash which seemed to shake the whole house.

There was a yell of delight, for it was not often that the miners of Golden Plume had a chance to see such a raree show as this.

"End of round first—time is up!" cried the man with the watch.

Liverpool Jack and his bouncers made haste to assist their man, while Keene, with a quiet smile upon his resolute face, walked to his stool, where his attendants proceeded to fan him with all their might, for the apartment was extremely hot on account of the number crowded into it.

Keene's breath came a little faster and there was more color in his cheeks than when the contest began, but otherwise he showed no signs that he had been indulging in violent muscular exercise.

Bendigo, on the contrary, was in a bad way, the extra weight of fat that he was carrying had made him short of breath and he was gasping like a fish out of water when his seconds got him on the stool.

A perfect Babel reigned in the saloon, for almost everybody was trying to talk at once.

The astonishment of the spectators at the manner in which the "Unknown" had handled Bendigo was great, and although two-thirds of the crowd had bet on the Englishman, and were therefore anxious for him to win, yet they could not help admiring the way in which the sport had fought.

And now, with that sudden revulsion which often takes possession of a crowd, hardly a man was there in the assemblage who had bet on Bendigo who was not anxious to hedge.

One and all wanted to back the sport, and were angry enough to kick themselves because they had put their money on the Englishman.

But in the first place there would not have been any betting at all to speak of if it had depended upon the miners, for all wanted to bet on Bendigo. Long Hank and the Express agent were the men who had kept speculation alive by taking the odds offered so freely on the bruiser, and now that the current of public opinion had set in another direction, it was impossible for any betting to go on when all of the speculators wanted to bet the same way. The miners very soon made this discovery, and then came into operation the cunning which all humans possess, more or less.

All who had bet on the Englishman felt satisfied that they were going to lose, and each and every man was anxious to save himself in some way.

A few enthusiastic souls offered to bet three to one that the sport would win, and found no takers, but there was a middle ground upon which all could take refuge.

It was a certain thing, to the notion of the crowd, that the sport would win. The terms of the battle were that he was to stand up for ten rounds.

In the minds of the spectators it was as sure as anything can be in this uncertain world that the sport would "stay" the ten rounds without doubt, but they had grave fears that Bendigo would not be able to last that long, and now the question was how long would he last?

There was a great difference of opinion upon this point, and therefore a chance for betting and the miners were quick to improve it.

Some of them who had bet heavily with Long Hank and the Express agent tried to get the pair to speculate upon this point, but their efforts were fruitless.

"Oh, no, boys, we are well satisfied to let things go as they are," the Express agent replied. "For myself, personally, I don't reckon that Bendigo will half last out the ten rounds, but I am not betting on it." So the miners had to bet among themselves.

There was dismay and disgust in the Englishman's corner.

"Blarst my heyes!" Liverpool Jack exclaimed. "See 'ere, Bendigo, this blooming duffer is making a bleeding chopping-block out of you!"

"I ain't in no condition for a go of this kind," the pugilist gasped. "Don't you see that I am fat as a hog?"

"Wot in the blooming, bleeding blazes did you want to go into the scrap for?" demanded Liverpool Jack, angrily. "By the lord 'arry! I will be bout nearly five 'undred chucks."

"Well, who expected to run up ag'in' a rooster of this ere kind?" the other replied. "Didn't we all think that it would be some chump that I could get away with without any trouble?"

"Yes, I s'pose you are right," Liverpool Jack observed, slowly. "This blooming Long Hank has completely taken us in."

"Can't we crawl out of it in some way?" the pugilist asked. "Can't we bring on a wrangle so as to git up a fight and break the match up?"

Liverpool Jack shook his head.

"Don't think that kin be worked, eh?"

"No, no! there is too big a crowd 'ere, and Long Hank has too many friends for us to try a dodge of that sort. All the coves have got barkers and it would end in bloody murder, and, like as not, we might git our ticket for soup."

"It's a blooming shame!" Bendigo declared. "For there isn't much doubt, ye know, that the cove will best me! If I was myself, you see—if I was the man I was a year ago, I would be good for him, but I am so fat now and out of condition that when the duffer gives me two or three punches in the wind it makes me feel like quitting."

"And the bleeding cove knows it too for he gives you a lick in the bread-basket whenever he kin," Liverpool Jack declared with a solemn shake of the head.

"My game now will be to close in on him whenever I can, so that when we break away I will have a chance to swing for his jaw," the bruiser remarked. "If I could land one good 'un, on the right spot, maybe, I could knock him out."

"Yes, try for it, and try too to git him to foul you; drop when you are in a clinch, and if he gives you one when you are on yer knees we will claim a foul, hinstanter!" Liverpool Jack declared. "We must do all we can you know to save our money."

"Time!" exclaimed Andy Williams at this point, thus abruptly putting an end to the conversation.

CHAPTER XX.

THE RESULT.

KEENE was on his feet in an instant, but the slugger came slowly up to the scratch, and it was plain from his appearance that he would have been glad of more time to recover from his exertions.

The Englishman was an experienced pugilist, but for all that he was puzzled to know how to get at his nimble antagonist, who was far lighter and quicker on his legs than any man he had ever met in the ring.

In the previous round his idea had been to "rush" his antagonist, relying upon his, supposed, superior weight and strength to bear down his man, but he had met with such ill-success that it rendered him wary about trying the same game again, so the bruiser had made up his mind to let his opponent do the leading and try to smash him in a "counter."

The two sparred for a few moments, and when the sport saw that Bendigo was not disposed to come to close quarters he guessed what tactics the other had made up his mind to try.

The moment this conviction came to him, the sport showed that he was a true ring general by changing his plan of operation.

All of a sudden he rushed upon Bendigo with the fury of a tiger, and fairly drove the bruiser before him with half a dozen apparently ferocious head blows, but these were but feints to throw the other off his guard, for as soon as he succeeded in confusing the Englishman, forcing him backward—and Bendigo retreated in an extremely clumsy manner—he watched his opportunity and sent in another of the terrible right hand "rib-roasters," which made the bruiser grunt with pain.

Rendered furiously wild by the blow Bendigo dashed at the sport, and boring in, despite the sharp punishment he received, succeeded in getting home a facer and a flush hit on the jaw, then, thinking he saw an opportunity for a "knock-out," he "swung" with his left, but Keene cleverly dodged the blow by ducking; coming up under the guard of Bendigo he got in one, two, on the stomach again, just over the mark, and then the bruiser closed in with Keene, getting some sharp punishment in the face as he did so.

The referee yelled "Break, break!" and the crowd took up the cry, wild with excitement, but the Englishman, though, never heeded the command, but holding on to his antagonist with a bear-like hug, endeavored to throw him.

"Break, break!" howled Bozain, dancing up and down in a frenzy of excitement.

"Break, break!" chorused the bystanders in wild confusion.

But Bendigo would not "break," and the sport could not; but the struggle only lasted for a few seconds, for, although the Englishman prided himself upon his wrestling abilities, yet Keene contrived to "back-heel" him. Down they went with a heavy crash, Bendigo underneath, and the sport lending his weight to increase the force of the fall.

"Foul, foul!" cried Liverpool Jack, as loud as he could shout. "I claim a foul—he fouled my man!"

"Go long; you are away off!" Long Hank retorted, yelling at the top of his lungs.

"Time's up!" howled the comic singer, having to shout as loud as he could so as to make himself heard above the din.

And a lucky thing it was for the bruiser that the end of the round had come, for it took both of his seconds to carry him to his corner, while the sport was not in the slightest need of any assistance.

"I claim a foul, Mr. Referee!" Liverpool Jack declared, after he had got his man on the stool.

"Better claim the earth!" the Express agent suggested in sarcasm.

"Wrestling is ag'in' the rules!" the Englishman cried.

"Who began it?" Long Hank demanded.

And then the scene of Babel was recalled again, for almost every man in the room tried to express his opinion on this point.

"Silence, silence!" yelled Bozain. "Will you hold your yawp, all on you, and gi'n me a chance to speak?"

The tumult quieted down.

"I reckon, gents, that you are all hyer to see a fight, ain't yer?" the landlord exclaimed.

The crowd, speaking as one man, declared that that was exactly what they had come to see.

"Wal, that is my notion, and I don't propose that you shall be cheated out of yer fun. This fight is going on, and I don't intend to let either one of the men wriggle out of it!" the landlord exclaimed, with great dignity. "My judgment is that thar wasn't no foul. It is ag'in' the rules to wrestle, and the men must break away when they are told to do it; but, although it seems to me that though Bendigo was the most to blame for the wrestling, yet as he didn't gain any advantage by it, I ain't going to lay it up ag'in' him, so the fight is to go on."

This decision gave general satisfaction, for it was apparent that it was a perfectly fair one, and the crowd loudly expressed their approbation, and even Liverpool Jack and his bouncer, although they growled and muttered that they wasn't going to "git no show for their money," yet they did not attempt to argue with the referee about the matter.

"How do you feel?" Long Hank asked of the sport, as he proceeded to rub him down with a towel, the exertion and the warmth of the room having started the perspiration.

"All right, only a little winded, for that last bout was a tough one," Keene replied.

"Wal, now, I reckon it was!" the driver exclaimed, in tones of admiration. "Why, do you know, you flaxed yer man so that he couldn't git up? His seconds had to carry him to his corner."

"The pace has been too fast for him," the sport remarked, with a smile. "I made it fast on purpose to wear him out. He carries too much fat to stay long in a contest of this kind. His own exertions wind him about as much as my blows."

"You bet?" the Express agent coincided.

"He is about at the end of his rope," Keene remarked. This wrestling business was his last dodge. He went in to throw me, calculating to add his own weight, so as to give me a good shaking up, but I was able to give him a dose of his own medicine."

"Which he didn't like to take," observed Long Hank, with a grin.

"How much longer do you think he will last?" the Express agent asked.

"I should not be surprised if this round finished him, for I have got him beaten," the sport replied. "He is too fat to last, in fact so thoroughly out of condition that it is a wonder he has done as well as he has."

"I suppose you will go right in to finish him now?" the Express agent remarked.

"Yes, I shall force the fighting and not give him any rest from now out," Keene replied. "If I can reach him in the wind three or four times more his goose is cooked."

"Didn't I tell ye, pard, that this hyer would be a paying speculation?" Long Hank exclaimed to the Express agent, in high glee.

But while the driver and the Wells and Fargo man were congratulating each other upon the success which had attended their efforts, there was naught but anger and deep disgust in the opposite corner.

It was true that Bendigo had to be carried to his corner; enthusiastic seconds often do carry their principal when there isn't any need of it, but, in this case, if the bruiser had not been carried he would never have been able to reach his corner, until some minutes had elapsed, for he was completely winded.

"Blast my heyes, old man, but you are in a bad way!" Liverpool Jack said to Bendigo after the discussion in regard to the foul had ended.

This foul business was a shrewd dodge on the part of the Englishman to gain time for his man. He calculated that the time-keeper would be apt to get interested in the discussion and so neglect to look sharply after the time, and this proved to be so.

Andy Williams, excited in regard to the question, did forget that he was the time-keeper, and so Bendigo gained some three minutes more in which to recover his wind than he was entitled to have.

"Oh, I am done for," the slugger replied, so exhausted that he could hardly speak.

"Oh, come now, not so bad as that!" Liverpool Jack exclaimed, encouragingly.

"Blame me if it ain't so!" the other responded, with a doleful shake of the head. "I tell you wot it is, it is them punches in the wind that this cove is a-giving me wot is doing the business."

"Yes, he has nailed you there pretty hard," the Englishman remarked.

"You kin bet yer blooming heyes on that!" Bendigo declared. "The licks I got on the cocoa-nut I don't mind. He could punch away at my 'ead all day, and I wouldn't mind it, but when he gits in one o' them cracks in the wind it kinder doubles me all up, and regularly seems for to take the life out of me."

"I say, old man, it ain't possible that this 'ere dandy sport is a-going to knock you hout, you know?" Liverpool Jack exclaimed, in deep disgust.

"Say, w'ot do you take me for, Liverpool?" the other retorted. "I h'am only flesh and blood, I h'am; I ain't made out of no iron, ye know, and when I meets a man who is a better slugger than I am I have got to knock under, and there ain't no two ways about it!"

"Yes, I s'pose so," but it was evident that the admission was fairly wrung from Liverpool Jack.

"It was my idee arter the first round that if I war as I used to be—in condition and fit to fight for a man's life—that I could best this cove, but, blame me if I hain't got a different opinion now," the bruiser declared.

"Is that so?"

"You kin bet on it!" Bendigo responded, emphatically. "This cove is an out-and-outer, and nobody but a world-beater has got any right to git into the ring with him. I don't believe I could have whipped him the best day I ever saw. He is no regular pug, but one of them amateur coves w'ot is often jest as good as the best of the sluggers who make their living out of the prize ring, and though, as a rule, them chaps don't have the sand to take the hard knocks that the regulars kin grin at, yet this cove kin stand the racket."

"Time!" cried Andy Williams at this point.

Keene advanced quickly to the center of the ring, apparently none the worse for the exertion he had made, for he looked to be as fresh as when he began.

But Bendigo was evidently very much under the weather, for he came slowly to the scratch, and there was a look on his face which seemed to plainly indicate that he had no inclination for the job before him.

The sport was general enough to understand that he had his man beaten, and all he had to do was to go in and finish him, so he led off at once.

There were some sharp counters, but the Englishman's blows lacked force; every time though that the sport got home on the stomach Bendigo plainly showed his dislike for the proceeding.

Three times the slugger tried to close in with his active foe, so as to escape punishment, but Keene managed to avoid his embraces; then at last he got an opportunity to swing his right in on the neck, and Bendigo went down all in a heap.

The yell that went up from the throats of the crowd was deafening.

All believed that the end of the fight had come, for it was the general opinion from the way that the slugger fell that he had been knocked out.

This was not really the truth, for although the blow was a terrific one and Bendigo had gone down under the stroke like the ox before the blow of the butcher, yet it had not really "put him to sleep," to use the term dear to the hearts of the sports who delight in boxing-matches.

He could have got up and renewed the battle, but was wise enough to understand that he was in such a state he could not possibly damage his opponent, and by attempting to go on with the fight would only subject himself to additional punishment, without any chance of his gaining anything by so doing.

So Bendigo played 'possum. After being knocked down he shut his eyes and pretended to be insensible.

Liverpool Jack and his bouncer made a movement as though to go to the assistance of the prostrate man, but Long Hank and Jerry Downing were on the watch for just such a thing.

"Don't you touch him!" the driver cried.

"Let your man alone!" the Express agent yelled. "It is against the rules for a man to be touched until the round is ended, and we don't want to win the match on no foul when our man has got the fight right in his own hands! Keep your eyes on the watch, Mr. Time-keeper! You are the man now who is running this thing!"

All eyes were now fixed upon Andy Williams, but the comic singer did not get "rattled."

"Oh, you kin bet that I am right up to the mark!" he declared. "One half minute more!"

A hush fell upon the assemblage; every neck was strained, all eyes distended.

"Another quarter!" a pause. "Three minutes are up! The Unknown wins!"

And then the crowd yelled to their hearts' content, while Liverpool Jack and his bouncer advanced with a look of disgust upon their faces to assist their fallen champion.

CHAPTER XXI.

AFTER THE FIGHT.

THE fight had only lasted about fifteen minutes, so that it was all over by eleven o'clock, and for the next hour the miners amused themselves by making Golden Plume bowl, as one of the chief leaders in the revels remarked.

Bendigo was taken away and put to bed, for he was completely used up, but Keene was so little injured that he leaped over the ropes at the end of the fight fully as nimbly as he had jumped into the ring at the beginning, and apart from some slight discoloration on his face, showed no signs that he had taken part in a hard-fought battle.

The miners wanted to make a "lion" out of the sport, but he would not have it.

"I am very much obliged to you, gentlemen,"

he said in response to the many invitations he received to indulge in the flowing bowl. "But I will have to ask you to excuse me. I have been through an experience which requires I should take some rest as soon as possible, and I hope you will not think I do not appreciate your good wishes if I get home to my hotel and get to bed as soon as possible."

The crowd in the most good-natured manner possible consented to excuse the hero of the hour and the sport departed, accompanied by Long Hank and Jerry Downing, both of whom were highly elated at the successful termination of the speculation.

The pair accompanied Keene to his room in the hotel, and, in their glee, insisted upon having a nice, hot lunch and a bottle of wine sent up.

"A bit to eat and a glass or two of champagne will not do you any hurt," the Express agent remarked.

"Nary a bit!" the driver exclaimed in his emphatic way. "And I reckon that if you managed to stow away a hull bottle of wine it would be all the better for you."

"Oh, I feel in need of a little refreshment, of course, but I did not want to make a night of it when I would be compelled to drink about ten times as much as I needed, so I got away from the crowd," the sport explained.

When the lunch was served and the champagne opened, the conversation turned upon the fight.

During the interval the Express agent had been figuring upon the results.

"Well, as near as I can figure the thing down, you will get a little over five hundred dollars for your share in this picnic," he announced to Keene.

"That is better than a lick in the back with a big stone!" Long Hank exclaimed, grinning.

"Yes, I should say that it was," the sport replied.

"And, mebbe, we kin scare up another pudding of this kind," the driver declared. "We ought to, for this is as good a thing as I have been in for ten years."

The Express agent shook his head.

"You don't think so?" the driver queried.

"Not likely!" Downing replied. "You must remember that this was in the nature of a surprise party. No one knew anything about our Unknown, and the miners bet two to one on Bendigo because they did not believe it was possible we could scare up any man in the camp who would stand any chance with him."

"That is so," Long Hank admitted.

"Lightning don't often strike twice in the same place, and it is safe to bet all we have won on this affair that we could not play a game of the kind on this camp again."

"No, nor anybody else," the sport observed, dryly. "The men here have got a lesson which will be apt to make them mighty cautious in the future, and the next unknown who strikes this town will not be apt to be held cheaply. The miners will be certain not to bet rashly against him until they find out all about the man."

"I reckon that you are 'bout right," the driver said. "But if this hyer Liverpool Jack ain't satisfied with the thrashing that his man got, and scares up some other galoot for a fight, you kin bet yer life that Jerry, and a cuss 'bout my size, will back you to our last dollar, hey, Jerry?"

The Express agent nodded assent.

"Well, gentlemen, while I am very much obliged to you indeed for this expression of the confidence which you have in me, yet I must warn you not to make any more matches where-in I am to figure as the principl," the sport observed. "While I have shown to-night that I am abundantly able to hold my own in the magic circle of the P. R. yet I am not desirous of being classed with the men who make a living by that sort of thing."

"In this case it was Hobson's choice with me, I came to the camp broke and I had to raise money some way. By following my profession as a card-sharp I can generally manage to make a good living, and, usually, a little more, but it is absolutely necessary for me to have some cash to back me, and now that I am in funds—on my legs again, as you might say—you can depend upon it that I do not care to go into any more fistic encounters."

"I reckon that you are right, pard!" the Express agent exclaimed. "If I was situated as you are I don't believe I would care to fight in a ring either."

"Mebbe you are right," the driver remarked. "But thar's no mistake 'bout your hauling in a heap of money this time in mighty short order."

"Ah, yes, if I could strike a picnic of this sort every week or so I might be induced to keep on," Keene declared. "But there isn't any chance of it."

The Express agent agreed to this, and then the conversation turned to subjects which have no connection with our story, and so we will not detail it.

After the lunch was finished, and the wine drank, the backers departed, and Keene went to bed, where he enjoyed the refreshing slumber which comes to a man in the full possession of health and strength.

He rose in good season in the morning, and after breakfast got an opportunity to converse with Miss Richmond.

She congratulated him upon the easy victory he had achieved, and explained that she was in possession of the particulars the preceding evening, for she and Lily Davenport had waited in the parlor until the banjo-player returned with the news, and with him he brought the hundred dollars which he had won, twenty for himself and eighty for Adrienne.

"So you see, thanks to your hint, I am eighty dollars better off than I should have been," she said, in conclusion.

"I am in about five hundred, so we are well prepared for a campaign," Keene remarked.

"Although I am very much obliged for your kind offer, yet I do not think I will have to call upon you for assistance as far as money goes," the girl declared. "I think I will have enough of my own, thanks to this windfall which I owe to you."

"All right! but you must not hesitate to call upon me if it is necessary. You can pay me back after you win the prize."

"But suppose that I fail and do not win?"

"Let it go then," Keene replied, indifferently. "I am going into the speculation with my eyes open, and if I lose I shall not complain."

"Very well; if I need money I will not hesitate to call upon you, and you can rest assured that if I succeed in my design you shall be well rewarded."

"Oh, that is all right," Keene rejoined. "I'm going into this thing because I take an interest in you. I think that you are a brave girl to undertake a task of this kind all alone, and I have made up my mind to see you through. If you win and can afford some day to pay me, well and good. I will take what you feel that you can give, but if you don't succeed and have only your labor for your pains, I shall not complain if I have to put up with the same."

Adrienne extended her hand, actuated by a sudden impulse, and the two clasped palms.

"You are a man indeed!" she exclaimed, "and I see now that I did not make any mistake when I thought I could trust you, although you were an utter stranger."

"I am not like other girls of my age, with my head full of romantic fancies, but have led a life which has made me old before my time. There is no romance about me, but I am as sternly practical as any business man of the world that you can find, and in this quest of mine I am pushed forward by two motives—avarice, for I desire to own this mining property, and revenge, as I am determined to hunt down the men whom I believe to have committed a cowardly murder. Between us two I believe the task can be accomplished."

"Well, I reckon we can make a good try for it!" Keene remarked in his quiet way, as the girl relinquished his grasp upon her hand, and sunk back in his seat.

"Now, as soon as I get my money to-day I am going to invest in a horse and then set out for a little ride, which will last until I arrive in White Oaks. It will not take me long to get at the truth, and when I return, which will be in a couple of days, you can depend upon my bringing you a full account."

"I shall wait with the utmost patience," Adrienne remarked. "I have full faith that you will do all that man can do."

"You can depend upon my doing all in my power!" Keene declared.

And after this assurance, he took his departure.

"Heaven indeed favored me when it gave me the opportunity to secure such an ally!" the girl declared.

CHAPTER XXII.

A DISCOVERY.

A LITTLE after nine o'clock a message came from Jerry Downing to the sport requesting him to come over to the Express Office.

Keene complied with the request, and the Express agent showed him the statement which he had made out of the results of the speculation and paid over to him his share, which was within a few cents of six hundred dollars.

"The thing panned out better than I expected," Downing remarked. "I did not think it would be much over five hundred dollars when I made a rough calculation last night, but it exceeded my anticipations."

"Well, it is much better to have it come out that way than for it to run short," the sport observed, as he pocketed the money.

"You bet! Thar's a heap of good sound horse sense in that!" Long Hank declared, who was present to assist in closing up the "picnic," as he remarked.

Then Keene observed, in a careless way, that as he was fond of riding he thought he should buy a horse, explaining that as he proposed to follow a card-sharp's life the time hung heavy on his hands during the day, and he knew of no better way to while away the idle hours than to spend a few of them on horseback.

Jerry Downing replied that he thought he had just the animal to suit, a beast which he had

bought on a speculation from a man who was obliged to leave the camp, and therefore he could afford to sell it cheap.

Keene examined the horse, a powerful roan mare, and an extra good beast for that section of country.

A bargain was soon made, and the horse sent over to the hotel corral.

Keene soon followed. The landlord of the Metropolitan happened to be in the corral when the sport arrived.

"Been buying a horse?" Bozain asked.

"Yes; I have a little business to which I must attend over at Murphy's Clearing, and I thought I would get a horse so I could ride over whenever I felt like it," the sport replied. "I am going to make a trip that way now," he continued, vaulting into the saddle with the ease of a practiced rider as he spoke. "I may be detained for a day or two, so just hold on to my room for me."

"All right," replied the landlord, and then the sport rode off.

He proceeded at a slow canter through the town, just as if he was out for amusement, trying the poses of his new purchase, but after he got well out of the camp, and secure from observation, he pushed forward at a good rate.

Naturally during his progress through the town he attracted considerable attention.

Every man he met bowed to him and said, "Howdy," in the most cordial manner, for the citizens esteemed it a favor to receive a salutation from the champion who had succeeded in putting the redoubtable Bendigo to sleep so easily.

As the sport rode past the White Gopher Mine three men, standing by the door of the office, nodded to him, and Keene acknowledged the bows as courteously as possible.

The three were Elliott Van Buren, Herman Gotterang and a slender, rather good-looking fellow, whose face was deeply seamed with the lines of dissipation.

This was the expert bookkeeper, Ned Davenport, Lily Davenport's husband.

He had a weak and sickly expression, and did not look as if he had much of a hold on life.

"I would give a fortune, if it was mine to give, if I was strong and healthy as that fellow!" Ned Davenport exclaimed, in an envious way, as the sport rode by.

And Keene, although he bowed to the three, and smiled as pleasantly as though they were the dearest friends he had in the world, yet to himself he whispered:

"If those three fellows had any idea of the nature of the errand upon which I am bound, the odds are big that they would do all in their power to keep me from ever reaching White Oaks."

"But this is a world of delusion, and it is not possible for us in the game of life to always make out what kind of cards the fellow has who sits on the opposite side of the table until he plays them; the fact makes the thing a good deal more interesting; but the surprising parts that occur sometimes are enough to make a man's hair stand on end!"

So the sport rode on his way, chuckling to himself as he thought how astonished the White Gopher men would be when they learned the object of his journey.

But, as the sport often remarked, this is an uncertain world, a fact which was destined to be brought forcibly home to his knowledge before he was many days older—but we will not anticipate.

Van Buren and the German exchanged glances after Ned Davenport spoke, but as his gaze was fixed wistfully upon the retreating horseman he did not notice the expression on the faces of the others.

Then when he turned his eyes upon them it vanished.

"Oh, you are all right, Davenport!" Van Buren exclaimed. "You must not get low-spirited because you don't happen to feel very well once in a while."

"Ah, but it is not once in a while; it is all the time," Davenport replied, with a mournful shake of the head.

"Is that so?" the German asked, with an expression of great concern.

"Yes, I am getting so that I haven't any appetite. I can't eat anything."

"Well, you make up for that by drinking, you know!" Van Buren declared, with a light laugh, as though he believed he had made a good joke.

"Yes, but how is the thing going to end?" the other exclaimed, in a very serious way.

"And how should it end?" Van Buren asked, as though he was surprised by the question.

"I can't go on in this way for very long, drinking like a fish and not eating enough to keep a canary bird alive!"

"You must change your programme," Van Buren replied, still smiling as though he considered the matter a jest. "You must eat more and drink less."

"Oh, it is all very well for you to advise me to do that, but I cannot carry it out!" Davenport exclaimed.

"I don't see how that can be," Van Buren observed.

"It ought to be easy enough if you will only try."

"Well, it is not!" Davenport exclaimed, doggedly. "I cannot let liquor alone. I must drink just so much or I believe I would go crazy. But it isn't the liquor that is troubling me; I can carry all I can drink readily enough, but this not being able to eat anything worries me. I know that it is not right. If a man doesn't eat he can't expect to live long, and although the world has never treated me very well yet I will be hanged if I am anxious to leave it yet awhile."

"As far as eating goes, my experience has been that the smallest eaters are usually the longest livers," Van Buren observed, thoughtfully.

"But I will tell you what you ought to do, Davenport; you ought to consult Doc Finnigan—the Doc will pull you through all right!"

"Bah! he is a big-mouthed bog-trotter—a fraud of the first water!" Ned Davenport declared, angrily. "He is nothing but a common country cow-doctor setting himself up to be a medical sharp!"

"Judging from this florid description of yours I should say that you had already consulted the doctor and the prescription he gave was not to your taste," Van Buren remarked, laughing.

"Ya, that is so, I guess!" the German declared. "The doctor usually speaks his mind out plain!"

"You are right, I did speak to the big-headed Irishman and he said that there wasn't anything the matter with me except that I was laboring under the delusion that I was a whisky barrel when I wasn't, and that if I would let liquor alone I would be all right."

"Well, advice of that kind is easily followed if a man thinks it advisable to do so," Van Buren observed, with the air of a philosopher.

"How much did he tax you for the counsel?"

"The impudent hound!" Davenport exclaimed, angrily. "I told him to his teeth what I thought of him, and if the boys hadn't got in between us, I reckon there would have been a shooting match."

"The doctor is hot-headed and it always riles him if any one doubts his skill," Van Buren declared.

"He is nothing but a blundering Paddy-whack!" Davenport declared. "If the fool was anything of a doctor he would be able to give me something so I would have a little appetite."

"That seems to be true," Van Buren observed.

"Ya, no doubt about it!" the German assented.

"But don't let us talk any more about the donkey!" Davenport exclaimed. "I get disgusted every time that I even hear his name mentioned."

"By the way, were you at the Palace last night to see the fight?" he asked, thus abruptly changing the subject.

"Oh, yes, you don't catch either Herman or myself missing any shows of that kind. We took it in and paid pretty dearly for our fun too, for we backed the Englishman, thinking that he could not possibly lose."

"Well, I never bet, so I did not get caught, but if I had bet, I most surely would have put my money on Bendigo, for I reckoned he had a sure thing," Davenport remarked.

"About everybody thought that way, and the majority of the sports are broke this morning!" Van Buren declared. "A bad case of misplaced confidence, you see."

"It is strange how these things happen," Ned Davenport remarked. "The sports of this camp reckon that they are as keen a set of men as can be scared up anywhere in the West, and before this event came off they would have hooted at the idea that they could be taken into camp so easily; this man, too, this sport, yesterday he was unknown, and no one in Golden Plume would have taken the trouble to turn the head to look at him as he passed along the street, but now everybody gapes after him."

"Such is fame! It cometh up like a flower!" Van Buren exclaimed.

"And, by the way, I made a discovery this morning," Davenport remarked. "I was up to the Metropolitan to see my wife. You know Lily and I do not get on very well together."

The others nodded.

"She pretends to think that I drink too much, but the whole trouble is that I haven't got the money to squander on her that I used to have, and she is like the most of the women, when the money is gone she hasn't got much use for the man," and Ned Davenport made this declaration with the air of a martyr.

"Women are notoriously fickle-minded," Van Buren observed.

"Well, I went to have a talk with her to see if we could not come to a better understanding. It was a failure, by the way, for she said she thought we got on much better apart, as we did nothing but quarrel when we were together," Davenport explained.

"If that is the truth it seems to me that she

was taking a sensible view of the matter," Van Buren said.

"We would get along all right if she would hold her tongue about my drinking and not kick up such a deuced row every time I got a little full," the husband explained, in an aggrieved tone.

"Women will be unreasonable, you know," Van Buren remarked.

"Oh, they all like to have men tied to their apron-strings," the German declared. "Like many men of his race, he believed that women had few rights, and a wife should be but little better than a slave to her husband."

"We didn't come to any agreement—except to let things remain as they are, but she is perfectly friendly, and talked like a parson to me upon the evil of my ways. She detected that I wasn't well, and, like that fool of a doctor, laid all to drinking, although I explained to her that it was not the liquor I drank but because I couldn't eat anything; of course, though, she obstinately stuck to her opinion."

And both the others shook their heads as much as to say, "Just like a woman!"

"We had a nice, agreeable conversation together after we got through with our discussion, for I did not get angry with her, nor she with me, and in the course of the talk she told me of an odd circumstance which had come to her knowledge. You know this new star who has come to the Metropolitan—this Adrienne Richmond?"

The others nodded assent; they were all attention now.

"Do you remember last night just before the fight began that Bendigo offered to bet the sport a hundred dollars against fifty that he would win?"

"Yes, and as Keene did not have the money the banter was taken up by Billy Skidder, the banjo-player," Van Buren observed.

"Exactly! well, forty dollars of the money that Skidder put up belonged to the Richmond girl, and by her pluck in betting on the Unknown—for she gave the money to Skidder and told him to bet before any one knew who the Unknown was—she gained eighty ducats."

Van Buren and the German looked at each other, a peculiar expression upon their faces.

"It seems to me that this was indeed odd," the proprietor of the White Gopher remarked.

"Yes, very odd," the German added.

"And my wife has got the idea that the girl knew that Keene was the Unknown when she made the bet," Davenport continued. "For when the performers were talking about the fight early in the evening, before it came off, and the banjo-player happened to mention that he was going to make a bet on the Unknown, she jumped at the chance to do the same, and as women are usually cautious how they go into anything of the kind, Lily got the idea she had a quiet tip in advance that the Unknown had a big show to win."

"It certainly looks as if that was true," Van Buren observed.

"They are acquainted—there is no doubt about that," the German said. "They came to town in the same stage, and it was the driver, Long Hank, who got up this match."

"Yes, and my wife, who has an uncommon sharp pair of eyes, and usually manages to see everything that is going on, has seen the pair talking together in the parlor of the hotel—the sport stops at the Metropolitan, you know."

The others nodded, and it was evident that both were seriously disturbed by the intelligence, but Davenport was not sharp enough to perceive the fact; he had drunk so much liquor that his perceptions were dulled.

"My wife has an idea that this Richmond woman is uncommonly smart too—she don't mean in her stage line, you know, but in private life. In fact she is rather stuck on the girl."

"Well, I must be going for it is about time for my noon drink, and whisky, I believe, is the only thing that keeps me alive." And with this declaration Davenport departed.

CHAPTER XXIII.

PREPARING FOR TROUBLE.

VAN BUREN and Gotterang looked at each other for a few moments, a serious expression upon their faces, until Ned Davenport got well out of hearing, and then the owner of the White Gopher said, slowly, and in a thoughtful way:

"What do you think of this, Herman?"

The German shook his head.

"You don't like the looks of it, eh?"

"No, I do not!"

"Neither do I. And the joke of the matter is that it has come upon us so unexpectedly—like a clap of thunder out of clear sky."

"Yes, everything was all right, and there did not seem to be a chance that there could be any trouble."

"You are right. I did not anticipate anything of the kind, but now I feel sure that this girl will worry us if she can," Van Buren observed, thoughtfully.

"Yes, that is the point; if she can, and what think you in regard to that?"

"Well, I don't know," the other replied, slowly. "My first impression was that the girl would not be able to trouble us any; that was when she

made her appearance, you know, and came to the mine in search of Kingsley."

The German nodded.

"Her appearance did not give me any uneasiness, for I said to myself: 'What can this girl, alone and friendless, probably without much money, do in a case of this kind, even if she had anything to go upon?' And you know, Herman, that there is not one chance in a thousand for her to make any discoveries."

"Yes, that is true; I reflected upon the matter myself, and came to the conclusion that she could not hope to do anything."

"I was not worrying about the matter at all!" Van Buren declared. "Although I will admit that when I discovered that she had made an engagement at the Metropolitan and intended to stay in the camp, I was a little annoyed, for, under the circumstances, I would have preferred that she should get out, still I wasn't borrowing any trouble."

"No, there did not seem to be any cause for alarm, but this story of Davenport's puts another face upon the matter!" the German exclaimed, shaking his head in a grave way.

"You are right!" Van Buren declared. "No doubt about that. The girl, alone and helpless, is one thing, but she, with this dare-devil sport at her back, is quite another!"

"Yes, but do you think you can depend upon Davenport's story?" the other asked. "Do you believe that the girl and this sport are in league?"

"I see no reason to doubt it. They most certainly came to town together, and although they have not been seen openly in company—I take my meals at the Metropolitan, you know, and I am aware that they do not come down to the table together—that does not prove that they are not working in concert. It would certainly be their game, under the circumstances, to try and keep the fact quiet."

"So as to take us by surprise!" Gotterang added.

"Exactly, but thanks to Mrs. Davenport we are in possession of the secret, and I can tell you, Herman, that I do not like the looks of the matter at all."

"Is not everything so arranged that it will be impossible for any one to obtain proof that there is anything wrong?" the German demanded.

"Well, it is my idea that we had made everything so secure we could laugh at any attempt to probe into the past, but now that an enemy has appeared in the field I do not feel one-half as certain about the matter as I did."

"The appearance of the girl has not changed matters any; everything is as it was before," the other argued.

"Yes, I know that well enough, but her appearance introduced a new and important factor which we did not calculate upon when we made the arrangements which resulted in the transfer of the White Gopher property from old man Kingsley to myself."

"If you remember, we took the ground in our calculations that there wasn't any one in existence who had any interest in Kingsley's property, and therefore when the fact of the transfer was made public, nobody would be apt to trouble their heads about the matter."

"Yes, but are you not going too far in assuming that this Richmond girl really has any interest in the matter?" Gotterang asked. "She came to Golden Plume to see Kingsley, it is true, but there isn't anything so far to prove that she has any legal claim upon him, or any right to inquire as to the disposition of his estate."

"I know that. I have taken all the facts into consideration, and looked at the matter in all possible lights," Van Buren replied.

"As you say, I haven't any proof to go on, but for all that I am satisfied that the girl has a claim of some kind on the old man, and so I believe that the chances are great she is entitled to an interest in his estate, therefore has a motive to inquire into all the particulars connected with the transfer of the mining property to me; if I am correct, she will be apt to take considerable pains to find out why Kingsley left Golden Plume so abruptly."

"Well, suppose that this is all true—that you have not made any mistake about the matter—what can she do? What can she find out?" the German demanded.

"Ah, now, my dear Herman, you are propounding a conundrum which is a little too much for me; I shall have to give it up."

"I can answer it easily enough. It is not possible for her to make any discoveries at all!" Gotterang declared.

"Now, my dear fellow, you are too positive about this matter—too positive altogether!" Van Buren asserted. "You are making the same mistake which a thousand smart men have made before you, and which has brought them to ruin."

"How is that?" the German asked, evidently perplexed.

"Why, you think we have arranged the matter in such a skillful way that no clew can be obtained to the truth," Van Buren replied. "I will admit that it really does look that way, but as I said, a thousand or more of men, just as

smart as we are, have made the same calculation, and, too late, discovered that there was some little point which they had not covered, so all their schemes were set at naught."

"Yes, I understand now, but I am loth to believe that it can be so in this case!" the German declared, with all the natural doggedness of his race.

"The wisest way it seems to me is to assume that there is danger of such a thing and prepare for it!" Van Buren declared.

"Oh, yes, that is true enough!"

"And that is just the course that I am going to pursue. I do not think there is a doubt that the girl and the sport have an understanding, and if that is the case, it is a strong team, for the sport is a dangerous man, and the girl, by her performance upon the stage, has turned the heads of half the men in the camp, and if she entered upon any kind of a struggle you can depend upon it she would find plenty of friends who would be glad to help her."

"No doubt about it! a young and pretty woman can always find friends, and then when she happens to be on the stage, as this one is, there are always a lot of fellows ready to make fools of themselves for her sake."

"Very true! and for that reason I regard her as likely to prove very dangerous, particularly if she can count on the assistance of this dare-devil sport, and I have no doubt that there is an understanding between the two."

"Well, if we find that the pair are going to make an attempt to annoy us we shall have to protect ourselves!" Gotterang declared with a dark look.

"Oh, yes, of course!" Van Buren declared. "You can rest assured that I shall not hesitate to strike, and strike promptly, the moment I am threatened with any danger. If there is going to be war I calculate to strike the first blow."

"We must be on the watch."

"I shall keep my eyes open, of course!" Van Buren declared. "I have been turning the matter over in my mind since we have been talking, and I have thought of a plan by means of which I may be able to gain an idea of what the girl is up to."

"That is good!" the other declared.

"Lily Davenport and I have always been on good terms, you know; it has been my game to keep on the right side of that lady, for she would be apt to turn out to be an ugly customer if she took it into her head to be spiteful."

Gotterang nodded assent.

"The plan I am going to work is to pretend that I have become fascinated by this Richmond girl," Van Buren explained. "I will call upon Lily and tell her that I am very much impressed with the new star, and that I should like to find out all about her."

"The chances are that Mrs. Davenport is not favorably disposed toward this girl, for she has rather put her nose out of joint," the German observed. "She was the star of the show until Miss Richmond came, but now is obliged to take second place."

"Yes, and if she is not furiously jealous, she is not the woman I take her to be," Van Buren declared. "I do not doubt that when she finds that I am interested in the girl she will be glad to tell me all she knows about her, for the odds are great, I reckon, that there isn't any love lost between the two, and the probability is that if I make Lily a good offer I can get her to play the spy upon this Miss Richmond, so I can be posted in regard to her movements."

The German thought this plan was a good one, and said as much.

And then Van Buren, who believed in striking while the iron was hot, proceeded to the hotel and called upon Mrs. Davenport.

But the schemer made a mistake in thinking that he could deceive that experienced woman, or induce her to aid him, although Van Buren did his best to tell a plausible story.

Lily Davenport was too old a bird to be caught with chaff, and she knew the White Gopher man too well to believe that he would play the fool for any woman.

"I don't know anything about the girl," she declared. "And if I did, I wouldn't say anything. I believe in minding my own business, so you will not get any information out of me."

Van Buren tried hard to induce Mrs. Davenport to change her mind, but the effort was fruitless of results, and the plotter was obliged to depart, no wiser than when he came.

But Lily Davenport was a true friend to Adrienne, for she lost no time in telling her of the occurrence.

CHAPTER XXIV.

IN WHITE OAKS.

KEENE arrived at White Oaks after an uneventful journey.

He had a slight acquaintance with one of the lawyers of the town, and, after putting his horse up in the hotel corral, proceeded to hunt up his acquaintance.

He found the lawyer's office without any difficulty, but was unlucky enough to meet with a

set-back, as the sport tersely termed it, right in the beginning.

The lawyer was out of town, and it was not certain when he would be back.

The office was over a store, and the storekeeper, an obliging fellow, gave the inquirer all the information in his power.

"The lawyer may be back this very day, or he may not be back for two or three; his coming was uncertain."

"Did you want to see him on a personal matter, or just on legal business? Because, if any lawyer would answer, there are two more in town, and both are here at present, for I was speaking with them a while ago."

The sport replied that he wanted to see the lawyer on a little matter of legal business, and as long as he was out of town he supposed that either one of the others would do.

"Well, Judge Drummond's office is right across the way, and you will find him in, for I saw him at the door not five minutes ago."

The sport thanked the man for his friendly advice, and proceeded to the office of the lawyer.

The judge was busy at his desk when Keene entered, an elderly, gray-bearded man, with an owl-like look.

He invited the sport to take a chair, and inquired what he could do for him.

"I want to see about the title to a certain piece of property."

"Ah, yes, I see," and the old gentleman rubbed his hands briskly together in a manner which denoted considerable satisfaction.

"You attend to such things?"

"Oh, yes, and I am very careful about it, too!" the judge asserted. "I always give such matters my personal attention. I do not know as you are aware of the fact, but a good many of my legal brethren do not look after such little things themselves; they delegate the duty to clerks—sometimes mere office-boys, but I hold that in a case of this kind, where an investment of hundreds of dollars may depend upon accurate information, the lawyer who takes charge of the matter ought to be certain of his own knowledge that everything is correct."

"Yes, I should think so," the sport responded, but he was not at all deceived by this statement. He understood that the old lawyer was only indulging in a little self-praise.

"Is this property situated here in White Oaks?"

"No; it is in Golden Plume."

"In Golden Plume?" said the old gentleman, slowly, and the quick ears of the sport detected a peculiar tone in the voice, and his experienced eyes, trained by long use to read the truth in men's faces, no matter how much they might try to hide their feelings beneath the mask of indifference, saw that the judge was disagreeably affected by his statement.

But the sport was fully as skillful at concealing his feelings as the best actor could be, and had such a perfect command over the muscles of his countenance that it would have puzzled the shrewdest reader of the "human face divine," to have told from his expression what thoughts were in his mind.

So the judge did not suspect that the stranger had detected that he was not pleased, as the sport repeated:

"Yes, the property is situated in Golden Plume."

"Well, that is a little out of my field," the legal gentleman observed. "Still, I may be able to attend to it for you. What is the name of the property? Give me the data, if you please," and as he spoke the judge dipped a pen in the ink, and drew a sheet of paper toward him as if to take notes.

"The property is known as the White Gopher Mine, and is now owned by one Elliott Van Buren, who got it from Mr. Victor Kingsley."

"Ah, yes, I see, a mining property," and the old lawyer made a few unmeaning scratches with his pen upon the paper.

"Yes, it is a mine."

"Well, I don't know, let me see!" and the old gentleman stared up at the ceiling for a moment as though he was deeply engaged in thought, and scratched his ear with the end of the penholder.

The sport conjectured what was coming before the lawyer spoke, so he was not surprised when the judge said:

"I don't believe that I will have time to go into this matter. These mining cases are usually complex; I had an idea, you know, that it was some little simple matter right at home here."

"No, it is in Golden Plume."

"Well, I can't really take it; sorry that it is so—"

"Oh, that is all right, good-morning!" the sport observed in his unconcerned way and then he departed.

"Now, what the deuce is the meaning of this?" Keene muttered after he got into the street.

"Lawyers are generally eager enough to take fees, and this old fellow was hot after the case until he discovered that it was the White Gopher property I was after."

"Can it be possible that the men in Golden

Plume have arms so long that they reach away down here to White Oaks?"

"I will be hanged if it don't look like it!" the sport exclaimed, after deliberating over the matter for a few moments.

"If this lawyer has been employed by Van Buren, of course he can't act for me, and I reckon that is the secret of his refusal.

"Now where is this other duck's office?"

And as Keene put the question he saw the "shingle" of the other lawyer on the opposite side of the street.

He crossed and entered the office.

The legal gentleman was a young sprig of the law, and he received the sport as though he had been a long-lost brother.

"A little legal business! Certainly! I will be happy to attend to it for you!" the gentleman declared.

Then Keene explained, and, to his amazement, the moment the White Gopher property and Golden Plume were mentioned the learned counselor immediately seemed to lose all interest.

He gave the same excuse as his elder brother in the law.

"Come to think of it, he had a lot of business to which he must attend, and these mining matters were generally so mixed up, really, he did not see how he could take the case, and then he politely bowed the sport out.

"Well, upon my word! if this don't beat the Dutch!" Keene exclaimed. "The White Gopher people have evidently captured the young lawyer as well as the old one!

"Now, there is only one more in the town and that is my acquaintance whom I saved from being skinned alive at poker when he had a little more liquor on board than he could conveniently carry.

"I don't believe that he has been left out in the cold, and I would be willing to bet at least ten to one that when I get hold of him he will be as loth to go into the affair as the others!"

And as the sport made this declaration his eyes were gladdened by the sight of the lawyer riding up the street.

The horseman dismounted, entered his office and Keene followed close upon his heels.

The lawyer remembered the sport and shook hands with him in the warmest manner.

Then Keene came to business at once.

"Oh, yes, I'll look into the matter!" the attorney declared.

But the moment the sport said, White Gopher, the expression upon the face of the other changed.

"A mine, eh?" he said. Well, I—

"Stop right there!" Keene exclaimed. "I know what you are going to say! You are very busy, mining titles are complex, and you don't think you can look after the matter."

The lawyer was astonished.

"Well, really, I—upon my word I don't see—"

"How I knew what you were going to say?" the sport interrupted. "Why, both the judge and that young cub of a lawyer gave me the same ghost-story so I ought to be pretty well up in it by this time!"

"Oh, you have been to the other two lawyers?"

"Yes, and none of you legal gentlemen, it seems, are willing to do anything for me, and I suppose that means that you have been retained by Elliott Van Buren; it is his little game to throw all the obstacles he can in the way of anybody who wants to find how it is that he managed to get possession of the White Gopher Mine."

"Well, that is business, you know!" the lawyer declared with a laugh. "If you were in possession of a piece of property, and you had an idea that some other parties were nosing around after it, you most certainly would be apt to take all the measures you could to prevent them from gaining any information."

"I don't know about that—that depends," the sport declared with a wise shake of the head.

"Depends upon what?"

"Upon the kind of title I had!" Keene replied, shrewdly. "If my title was all right, I should not be in the least degree alarmed about anybody looking into it. On the contrary I should court investigation. I would say, 'See here, my title is good and I defy you to find a flaw in it, search as carefully as you may!' And from the fact that Van Buren is so alarmed I am satisfied that he fears an investigation, which shows that there is something rotten in Denmark!"

"You ought to be a lawyer, for you have argued this out well," the other declared with a laugh. "But as I have taken the man's money I must do the best I can for him."

"Of course!"

"But I haven't forgotten that you did me a service once, and now I'll help you out a little. All the records are at the court-house and open for inspection. You have eyes and can learn all the facts as well as any lawyer in the land, but you mustn't give me away!"

"Oh, no!" the sport declared. Then he thanked the friendly limb of the law for his counsel, inquired the way to the court-house, and then took his departure.

CHAPTER XXV.

KEEN BILLY INTERVIEWS THE CLERK.

"Well, I have succeeded in getting a 'steer,' anyway," the sharp exclaimed, as he walked down the street after leaving the lawyer's office.

"I am rather surprised at the way affairs have turned out, for I had no idea that I would have any trouble about the matter. I supposed that as soon as I got to White Oaks all would be plain sailing, but this little experience satisfies me that the men who are on the opposite side of this affair are putting up the strongest kind of a game, and I must go in and hustle for all I am worth if I expect to gain any advantage.

"It is plain that the White Gopher people expected trouble, and have done their best to prepare for it.

"The fight will be an up-hill one, no doubt about that, for the contest begins with the enemy in a strong position, and it is going to be a hard struggle, but I'm in for the war, and I will do my best to make it hot for the White Gopher men."

Meditating after this fashion, the sport proceeded to the court-house, which was a rather primitive structure on the outskirts of the town.

A tin sign upon a door indicated the office of the clerk, and Keene entered without any ceremony.

The office was a small one, and plainly furnished—a table, a desk, three chairs and a safe.

There was but a single occupant, a big, burly fellow, with a long, sandy-colored beard, who sat in an arm-chair, with his feet cocked up on the table, reading a newspaper and smoking a cigar.

As soon as the sport got a good look at the man he saw how justly he was entitled to the name of "Sandy" Smith, for both hair and beard were of that color.

"How are ye?" said Keene, in his quiet, polite way, with a friendly nod.

"Howd'y," responded the official, lowering his paper a little, and gazing over the top of it with an inquiring look.

"You are the clerk?"

"I reckon I am."

"I shall have to trouble you upon a little matter of business."

"No trouble at all if there is any money in it for me," responded the official, with a grin.

"Ah, you are on the make?"

"That is what I am hyer for, young feller. You don't suppose I am holding down this chair for fun?"

"No, I presume not; money is what we are all after."

"Right you are! and you are safe in betting all yer ducats on it, too!"

"Well, I am prepared to put up," Keene observed. "I am not so unreasonable as to expect any one to take any trouble for me for nothing."

"That is where your head is level!" the other declared, with an approving nod. "What do you want?"

"I desire to find out the particulars in regard to the transfer of a certain piece of property—to examine in regard to the title," Keene explained.

"Oh, come now, this ain't exactly the square thing, you know!" the clerk declared. "Are you a lawyer?"

"Oh, no!"

"Well, I reckoned that you wasn't, for you look more like a sport."

"I do a little in that line once in a while," Keene admitted, in a modest way.

"I reckoned so the moment I clapped my peepers on you!" the clerk declared.

"Now, sport, every man to his own business is my idea," the official continued. "This little game that you are going in to play now is all out of your line, and you ought to get some legal sharp to take the hand—you savvy?"

"Yes, I understand, but there are certain reasons why I cannot work the scheme in that way," Keene explained, "so I am compelled to go ahead on my own hook."

"Ain't well heeled with ducats?" Sandy Smith inquired, in a rather offensive way.

Keene did not take any notice of the peculiar tone, although there was a glint of fire in his eyes as he replied:

"Well, I am not boasting of my wealth, but I reckon I have got enough here to enable me to get along without troubling my friends to put up for me."

"Worse and worse!" exclaimed the official, his manner now decidedly offensive. "If a man is broke, clean down to the bed-rock, so to speak, I can understand his trying to beat the legal sharps out of a fee, but if he has the rocks he ought to put up by all means. You savvy ag'in?"

"Oh, yes, you don't have to knock me down with a club to make me understand anything," Keene replied.

"Well, that is lucky! I like a man who has sense enough to understand good, plain United States talk!"

"No one ever accused me of being deficient in comprehension."

"You sports are generally wide awake

enough, and I am surprised that a man like you should go in to skin the legal sharks! 'Tain't right, you know! Dog ought not to eat dog."

"That is true, I admit, but circumstances alter cases, you know."

"You will not save any money by the operation, if that is the little game you are trying to play, for I make it a rule to stand in with the lawyers, every time! and if you don't pay one of them a fee, why, it is a kind of a p'int of honor for me to collect it; savvy ag'in?"

"Oh, yes! Well, I am not kicking, you know," Keene replied, placidly.

"That shows your head is screwed on right!" Sandy Smith declared with a grin.

"How much do you want?"

"That depends upon the nature of the information you require."

"That is the amount of trouble you are put to eh?"

"Oh, no, I don't reckon to take any trouble at all!" the official declared, bluntly. "What do you s'pose I am hyer for—for fun? not much! I charge for permitting you to look at the records, and I don't propose to go into that line of business myself."

"Ah, yes, I see."

The temper of the sport was rising as could plainly be perceived by the peculiar glitter in his resolute eyes, but as his tone did not change, the clerk, who was a dull-witted fellow, had no suspicions that a storm was brewing.

"I start on ten dollars, nothing lower than that, and run up to fifty or a hundred according to the value of the property that the man wants to look after."

"Yes, but I say isn't this a little irregular?" Keene asked, in a very innocent way.

"Irregular?" cried the clerk, with an angry frown. "What in blazes do you mean?"

"Well, I am not a lawyer, you know, and so, of course, I am not as well-posted about such affairs as I might be, but I had always supposed that records of this kind were open to the inspection of the public at reasonable hours, and that the clerk was obliged to produce the books when called upon so to do."

"I see that you reckon you know a heap!" the other cried, in an insolent way. "But I kin just tell you one thing, and that is that what you know ain't a marker to what you don't know! That is a straight tip now I am giving you, and don't you forget it!"

"Partner, that goes without saying!" the sport declared. "But for all that I reckon I am right in my statement."

"Mebbe you are, and mebbe you ain't, but one thing is a moral certainty: I am in the office to make a stake, and I reckon to have my little rake out of everything that goes on in hyer, and if I don't git it, why, then I ain't as smart as I think I am."

"Mebbe the law does say that I ought to produce my books when anybody axes for them, but I have got such a blamed bad memory that I don't remember anything about it, and I know mighty well that the books don't come out of that safe until some ducats are put up. If a man wants to come into the game he mustn't forget to 'ante up,' you know, and if he ain't willing to 'see the buck,' why he kin hire a lawyer and go before some judge, and git an order, which I will have to obey, but most men who ain't dod-gasted, wooden-headed fools think that it is cheaper to pay me, right at the beginning, than to go to all that trouble."

"I reckon they are right about that," the sport admitted, with an air of deep reflection.

"Of course they are right, and there's no two ways about it!"

"You are correct, for the other course would take time, and, undoubtedly, cost more money."

"You bet!" the official exclaimed, emphatically. "It is a heap sight cheaper to 'see' me and ante right up in the first place."

"I reckon I will have to do business with you then," and Keene smiled in the face of the other, but there was a look in his eyes which showed plainly that there wasn't any merriment in his heart, but the clerk was too dull to see it.

"It will be money in your pocket!" the other declared.

"How much did you say?" Keene asked, putting his hand in his pocket, as if he was about to produce his cash.

"Not less than ten dollars, and mebbe more, I said. It depends upon the value of the property. 'I can't tell you how much until I know all the facts in the premises, as a legal sharp would say. You see I have so much to do with these lawyers that I am half a lawyer myself!" the clerk declared in an extremely complacent way.

"Yes, I suppose so. Well, I wanted to see the records about the White Gopher Mine property, situated at Golden Plume."

A low, prolonged whistle came from the lips of the official and he took his legs down from the table, and stared at the sport in amazement.

"The White Gopher of Golden Plume!" he cried.

"That is what I said."

"And you want to examine the title?"

"Yes, I would like to look into the matter."

"Well, if this don't beat all!" the official muttered, evidently speaking to himself, but his tone was loud enough to enable the sharp to distinguish his words.

"I reckoned that something was up, but I didn't expect it so soon," the clerk continued.

"The White Gopher, eh?" he exclaimed, aloud.

"That is the property I want to see about," Keene replied.

"It will cost you a hundred dollars!" the clerk exclaimed, throwing back his head in a defiant way.

"A hundred dollars?" cried the sport as if amazed.

"That is what I said! A hundred solid ducats!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

A WEIGHTY ARGUMENT.

THERE was silence for a good long minute.

The sport looked at the official with an inquiring glance, as much as to ask if his ears had not deceived him, and Sandy Smith grinned in the face of the visitor, as though he considered the whole thing to be an extremely good joke.

"A hundred dollars!" Keene exclaimed at last, dwelling on each word.

"That is the figure!"

"Say! haven't you made some mistake about this matter?"

"Nary a mistake!"

"You don't think that I want to buy the property from you, do you?"

"Well, I reckon not! I haven't got it for sale, and it would take a hundred times a hundred to fetch it, if what I have heard in regard to the value is true."

"A hundred dollars just for the privilege of looking at the record?"

"That's the price, and if you have not got it, you might as well clear out, for I shall not drop a dollar!"

"Well, if that is the price, and there is no way of getting around it, I suppose I shall have to stand the racket," and again the sport's hand sought his pocket.

The eyes of the clerk dilated as he saw the movement.

"You don't mean to say that you have the sand to put up a hundred just for a sight?" he exclaimed, in wonder.

"Well, I don't exactly see how I can get out of it, so long as you are not willing to make a lower tariff."

"What in thunder is up 'bout this White Gopher property, anyway?" the clerk exclaimed.

"Not much, I reckon."

"I reckon there is, or else you would not be willing to go a hundred on it!"

"Oh, well, I am kinder free with my money sometimes, and as I realize that you are here for the cash you can get out of the place, I am willing to help you along," and as he spoke Keene smiled, showing his teeth in a peculiar way, and now, for the first time, Sandy Smith made the discovery that there was something menacing in the "grin" of the other.

The clerk took the alarm at once, and it made him "mad" to think that the stranger should attempt to make game of him.

"Ah! none of that!" he cried. "You need not try to pull the wool over my eyes, for I will not have it!"

"I reckon that you ain't got money enough to afford to throw any hundred dollars away even if you are a sport; you can't play no game of that kind on me, for I wasn't born yesterday."

"Will you bet a hundred that I will not put the ante up?" Keene exclaimed.

"No, I won't! And you might as well understand first as last that a hundred ain't enough! Since you are so free with your money I will raise the ante and it will now cost you two hundred to come in!" And the official laughed, sneeringly, as he made the announcement.

"Well, I reckon I have got two hundred!" and down went the hand in the pocket again, much to the amazement of the official.

"You don't mean to say that you will put up two hundred!" Sandy Smith cried.

"Well, I will have to stand the raise if you insist upon putting up the figure!" And as he spoke Keene drew forth a roll of bills.

"You are clean off your nut!" the clerk exclaimed.

"Two hundred, eh?" the sport said in a business-like way, and he made a motion as though about to count the money.

"No, I said three hundred!" Sandy Smith cried with a malicious grin.

The sport coughed in a quiet way and pocketed his roll.

"Aha, that stumps you, hey? the other cried.

"Sandy Smith, you are a colossal and glittering ass!" Keene declared.

The clerk was on his feet in an instant, white with rage.

"What is that you say, you infernal scoundrel?" he fairly howled, indignantly. Do you dare to insult me in my own office?"

"Nary an insult! It is the truth, and no mistake!" the sport retorted. "If you were not one you never would have believed for a mo-

ment that I would be fool enough to give you a hundred dollars for a service which isn't worth a cent.

"I was only playing with you, old man. I wanted to see just how big a donkey you were, and now I am satisfied that you are entitled to a leather medal as the champion ass of New Mexico!"

This insult was more than the clerk could brook. If the words had come from a bigger man than himself, he would have been apt to have drawn his revolver, but as Keene was smaller, he made up his mind to avenge the insult by thrashing the impudent stranger within an inch of his life.

"You scoundrel! I will hammer you until you are black and blue!" the clerk yelled, and then he rushed upon the sport.

This was exactly what Keene expected. He saw that it would not be possible for him to get along with the official, and so he had made up his mind to bring on a fight, whip his man to a stand-still, and then see if he would not be willing to listen to reason.

So Keene was all prepared for the attack, and as the clerk rushed forward he received a "right-hander," which alighted with such terrific force upon his jaw that for a few moments Sandy Smith labored under the impression that not only had the blow loosened all his teeth, but that the jawbone itself had gone up into the middle of his forehead.

He staggered backward a step, and then the sport banged him in the chest, just under the heart, with his terrible left fist.

Over went the clerk, knocked out completely, and as he fell, his head came in contact with the floor so sharply that he was stunned.

The sport took advantage of his foe's insensibility to remove his revolver, then he sat down and waited for him to recover.

In a couple of minutes the shock passed away, the clerk rose to a sitting posture, and glared at the sport.

"Really, you are knocked out, you know," the sharp said. "But I didn't call 'time' on you, for I was willing to give you another chance to come up to the scratch and show what you are made of; you see I am as easy a man as you ever struck!"

"You scoundrel!" the official ejaculated, and he felt for his revolver.

"That game will not work!" Keene declared. "I had an idea that you might try something of the sort, and so I took your pop-gun away from you."

The other glared at the sport.

"But I give you fair warning! You wouldn't stand any more chance to beat me with guns than you do with fists, but there is this difference: If I knock you down, it will not take you long to recover, but if I once drive a ball through you, it is 'good-by, John!'"

Sandy Smith rose slowly to his feet, and sunk into a near-by chair. He was completely exhausted by the experience through which he had just passed, and though in the first moments of his recovery he had felt for his pistol with a wild idea of attempting to avenge by arms his defeat, yet, now that he had time to think over the matter, he realized that he stood but little chance to get the best of the sport who seemed to be bred to the trade of war.

"I reckon I am willing to call the thing quits, just as she stands," the clerk remarked, slowly and with great reluctance.

"You have more sense than I believed," the sport commented, "but, my dear Sandy, it pains me to remark that if you are willing to call it quits, as the affair stands at present, I am not. I came here to see certain records, and I am going to see them, too, if I have to wipe out every clerk in New Mexico! Do you savvy? I am going to make a personal matter out of this; if you refuse to show me these books I will publicly post you in the streets of this town as a contemptible, low-lived coward, and then you will either have to fight me, or admit that you do not dare to come up to the scratch."

The breath of Sandy Smith came hard and fast.

"I am no coward!" he declared. "But a man ain't required to go into a fight when he doesn't stand any show. Fighting is your business—your trade, evidently, and I would be a fool to risk my life, when there isn't any show for me."

"It is astonishing how much sense you are displaying since you got that couple of cracks," the sport remarked.

"Now, Sandy, my tulip, I understand the kind of a game that has been put up. Somebody in Golden Plume had an idea that somebody else might want to look into the White Gopher title, so they quietly made an arrangement with you to block the investigation. They probably offered to give you as much money to keep the books from being examined as any one would pay for the service."

"The thing don't amount to much, anyway, but it is the game of the party, evidently, who got up this job, to put all possible obstacles in the way of an investigation."

"Now I appreciate that you want to make all the money that you can out of the affair, but you can't hold those books back without its costing you more than you can make out of it. I can suggest a way, though, for you to work it, for it is my game to make the men on the other side pay out all the money that I can."

"You can write to them and tell a cock-and-bull story about the books being examined in your absence—you put the books on the table and step outside the door while I make the search—that will save your conscience all right, for I suppose it is a little delicate."

The clerk winced at the sarcasm.

"You can explain that it wasn't your fault, and give a description of me, and the chances are big that the White Gopher people will come down handsomely."

The clerk reflected over the matter for a few minutes.

As far as he could see the course suggested by the sport was the best one for him to follow, and so he said he would agree to the proposition.

He produced the books, and then retreated to the doorway, standing just without the threshold.

The sport was soon in possession of all the facts that he desired to obtain, which he jotted down in his memorandum-book, and then he took his departure, much to the relief of Sandy Smith, whose parting request was that the affair should be kept quiet, and Keene consented.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE NOTARY PUBLIC.

"So far, so good!" the sport exclaimed after he got into the street. "I have made a beginning. The game is on and the first trick is mine!"

"The White Gopher man made up his mind that I should not gain any information from the clerk, and as I told that individual, I understood how the game was worked just as well as though I had stocked the cards myself."

"Van Buren told this blow-hard that he would pay him as much to keep back information as any one would offer for it, and that is the reason why he struck me for a hundred first, and then when he supposed I was going to be fool enough to pay the price he increased the figure. If he had not been the biggest kind of a fool he might have known that no one would pay a hundred dollars just for the sake of looking at the records."

"There is something crooked about the affair or else Van Buren—who, of course, is the man in the background, engineering this thing—would never have taken the trouble he has to block the way."

"But, as I said before, the trick is mine. I have procured the information I was in search of, even if I could not get any lawyer to help me, and now the next point is to look into the particulars of the transfer."

"Gotterang and Davenport were the witnesses, as I expected, and now comes the question, where will I find this William Carreck, the notary public, in whose presence the deed was executed?"

"I never heard of any such man in Golden Plume, and, in fact, I don't believe that there is a notary public in that camp."

"He must be here in this town then, and as it is more than probably that Van Buren has tampered with him too, I must be careful how I go ahead. If the White Gopher man secured all the lawyers, and the clerk, it is big money that he gathered in the notary public as well."

The sport halted and pondered over the matter for a few moments.

"I must be careful how I proceed, for it will not do to make any mistake about the matter," he mused. "Having won the first trick I must play my best for the second."

"It seems to me that the best move for me to make at present is to find out all I can about William Carreck before I go to see him. According to the date on the deed it was executed the day after the one on which Kingsley disappeared from Golden Plume."

"That was cunningly arranged, for the story that Van Buren will tell is that he, and the witnesses to the deed, accompanied Kingsley to this place, where the transfer was made, and then Kingsley went away to the East, or West, just according to Van Buren's notion as to the most probable destination, and the precious pair, Gotterang and Davenport, who are as deep in the mud as Van Buren is in the mire, will, undoubtedly, swear to the correctness of the story."

The sport's meditations were interrupted at this point by the appearance of the storekeeper with whom he had before conversed.

As it happened, the sport had chanced to halt in front of the store.

"Did you succeed in finding a lawyer?" the storekeeper asked.

"Oh, yes, but it seems that the business I have needs a man who is a notary public," Keene replied.

"Well, there is one in town, and only one, old Billy Carreck, and a sweet-scented old son-of-a-gun he is, too!" the man declared.

"Is that so?" Keene exclaimed, betraying so

much interest in his manner that the other was induced to go on.

"Yes, you can bet high on that, and you would win, every time," the storekeeper declared. "He is the postmaster here. That is his store across the street. I am not down on the man, you know, because he is in the same line as myself, but I am jest giving you the solid, bottom facts. He is no opposition to me, or to any one else in the town, either, for he doesn't attend to business. He is too fond of licker and gambling; but as he has nobody to look out for but himself, he manages to get along."

"Well, I will not have much business with him," the sport explained. "And, maybe, none at all, if a certain party don't come up to time."

"That will be all right, but if it was anything where he could get a chance to skin you, it is a moral certainty that he would try his best to do it."

"I see! He must be a kind of a tough citizen, but I say, if my man should happen to come to town at night where would he be apt to find this Carreck?"

"He stays at the store until about nine—that is the time we usually close up, and then he goes over to the You Bet Saloon—that is on this side of the street, right opposite his store, and hangs out there until midnight. If you want him any time after nine you will find him in the saloon."

"Maybe I will not want him at all but I am much obliged for the information."

Then the sharp went down the street to the hotel and secured a room.

This done he visited Billy Carreck's store and bought a necktie so as to see what kind of a man the shopkeeper was.

He found him to be a wrinkled old fellow with a face as hard as a pine-knot, and saw immediately that he could not hope to play on old Billy the game which had succeeded so well with the clerk, Sandy Smith.

But the sport was fertile in expedients, and made up his mind how to get around the postmaster before he had been five minutes in the place.

When Keene came to pay for the necktie he produced his big roll of bills and the eyes of the old man glistened at the sight.

"You are well fixed!" he remarked.

"Yes, I have got enough to get along with."

"You are a sport, I reckon."

"Well, now that's funny! You are about the tenth man who has asked me that!" Keene exclaimed in a very innocent way.

"You kinder look like one, and then you are well heeled," the other explained.

"I am considerable of a speculator and I play a game of poker once in a while, but I reckon that if I went in to beat a regular sport I would be apt to come out at the little end of the horn."

The storekeeper was quick to take the bait thus skillfully presented.

"I am very fond of a quiet game of poker myself, and there is a little gang which meets almost every night in my back room hyer," and the old man nodded his head toward the rear of the store.

"Well, now that is jest the kind of a crowd I would like to get in with!" the sport declared. "I never care to go into any of these public games, for a man never can tell who he is bucking against, and though I think I play a pretty stiff game, yet I don't stand any chance if I get in with a lot of sharks."

The postmaster agreed to this, and gave the other an invitation to come over and have a quiet game.

"My clerk runs the store at night, and I am at liberty to play," he explained.

So it was arranged that the sport was to drop in that night about eight o'clock.

Keene saw through the postmaster's game: the old man had picked him out for a tenderfoot, and invited him to a little game for the purpose of possessing himself of the attractive roll of bills which he had displayed, and this was just what the sport expected.

He made his appearance promptly on time in the evening.

Of course, the poker party which was accustomed to meet in the little back room of the store existed only in the imagination of the postmaster, but in order to give an appearance of truth to the fiction Carreck had invited a crony of his to assist in skinning the stranger.

The two were busy in a "little game" when the sport made his appearance, and then when the hand was finished Keene joined in the play.

It was his game to lead the two to believe that he was a tenderfoot who could be plundered, and he managed the matter so well that they had no suspicion that they were trying to beat one of the greatest short-card players that ever operated in the West.

Keene allowed the pair to win; not a great deal, but just enough to give them the impression that they had a sure thing, and after the game had gone on for an hour, the sport complained that it was dry work and sent for a bottle of whisky.

The clerk, having closed the store, went for

the liquor, and when he returned joined the party as a spectator.

Both he and the proprietor slept in the store. As the game proceeded, the liquor was drunk, and in two hours more the landlord was fifty dollars ahead, the crony was broke, and all the party, with the exception of Keene, well under the influence of the liquor.

Then Keene, thinking that old Billy was in a fit condition to talk, turned the conversation to mining matters, and related how a friend of his at Golden Plume had got hold of a very valuable mine for about half price, winding up with the declaration that El Van Buren was always a durned lucky fellow.

"Why, I know him!" the postmaster exclaimed. "The deed which transferred the mine to him was executed before me!"

"Oh, then you know Victor Kingsley, too! He's another old friend of mine," Keene declared.

"Yes, I know him—that is, I met him once when he came before me and executed the deed."

"Well, but I thought the law required that a notary public should know that the man who executes the deed is really the person he represents himself to be!" the sharp exclaimed, in pretended amazement.

"Oh, that is all right!" the postmaster replied, with a laugh and a sly wink. "There is more than one way to kill a cat, you see, and when I don't know the party who wants to make the deed, why somebody introduces him to me, and then I know him, you know!" and then the old fellow chuckled.

"Ah, yes, and I suppose Van Buren introduced Kingsley to you."

"No; it was Ned Davenport, for Van Buren wasn't here. That German, Gotterang, acted for him."

"How was Kingsley looking?—he was a pretty sick man when he came out to this country, and it was my idea that he would make a die of it here," the sport remarked.

"Darned if I know how he looked!" the postmaster replied. "I never saw him but once, and then it was about ten o'clock at night. The three, Davenport, Gotterang and Kingsley came to the store here and sent a message over to the You Bet Saloon that they wanted to see me on a little business. Davenport came over, and he was so hungry for liquor that I reckon we had six or seven drinks afore we came back, and as I had been h'isting pretty freely I was mighty well slewed, but I was able to attend to the business all right; as for telling you, though, how Kingsley looked, that is an impossibility, for I only saw him then, and 'bout all I noticed was that he was no chicken."

"I don't suppose that you would know him if you ran up against him," the sport exclaimed, in a jovial way.

"No, of course not, unless there was money in it for me, and then you bet I could pick him out—that is, if I was put on to him beforehand!" the old fellow declared, with a grin.

"You are a man who can take care of himself!" Keene remarked, with a laugh.

"You bet!" the postmaster answered, with a great deal of drunken dignity. "Did you hear anything 'bout there being any trouble over the White Gopher property?" he asked, abruptly.

"No, is there any?" Keene questioned, as if amazed.

"Well, I dunno," and the old man shook his head gravely, while a wise look came over his face. "But I kinder suspected that there was going to be some, 'cos I got a message from Van Buren 'tother day that he wanted me to keep shet 'bout the transfer and not give anything away if anybody came a-nosing 'round."

"You are just the kind of man to live right up to that!" the sport declared.

"Oh, you kin bet high on that! And Van Buren wrote for me to let him know if anybody came, and said he would pay me well for my trouble."

"Van Buren is a liberal fellow!" Keene declared.

"Yes, and I am going to work for him unless somebody comes along who can afford to give me more money," and the postmaster grinned again.

Then the game proceeded, and as Keene had got all the information he wanted he went in to clean out the postmaster, which he did in short order, and without remorse, for he saw that he was a regular old rascal.

An hour ended the game, the postmaster was broke as well as his crony, and the sport retired in triumph, leaving behind him three very drunk and very disgusted men.

The expedition had been a success.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

KEENE'S DECISION.

THE sport enjoyed a sound night's sleep and early in the morning got his breakfast, mounted his horse and rode off for Golden Plume, getting out of White Oaks before a majority of the inhabitants of that lively burg had risen from their beds.

He was prompted to this early move because the landlord of the hotel told him that Sandy

Smith had inquired in regard to his whereabouts during the preceding evening, and, as it happened, got no satisfaction out of the landlord, for by one of those unaccountable blunders which the best of men sometimes make, the host did not recognize the sharp by the description the clerk gave, and declared he didn't know any such man.

After Sandy Smith departed though, it had suddenly flashed upon the landlord that the sport might be the man of whom the clerk was in search, so when the sport came in the host related the circumstance to him.

Keene replied, carelessly, that he "reckoned" there was a mistake about the matter for he hadn't lost any Sandy Smiths, but this intelligence hastened his departure.

It was one of the cardinal principles of the sport never to get into a fight if he could help it; he acted on the sage old courtier's advice to his son in Shakespeare's Hamlet:

"Beware of entering into a quarrel, but once in, bear it so that they opposed may beware of thee."

In this matter his idea was that Sandy Smith, feeling agrieved by the manner in which he had been treated, had got his friends together with the idea of making it extremely warm for a gentleman about his size.

In a case of this kind the sport considered prudence to be a virtue, and so he shook the dust of White Oaks from his feet as soon as possible.

And now that we may be able to dismiss the subject, and not have to refer to it again, we will say that, notwithstanding his acuteness, Keene had jumped to a wrong conclusion.

Sandy Smith had meditated over the matter and decided that he could make a better bargain with the sport than with Van Buren, and he wanted to see Keene to ask him how much he would be willing to give to have the knowledge of his visit kept from the White Gopher man.

But when he was unable to find Keene he became enraged, and, as a means of getting square with the sport, wrote to Elliott Van Buren and related how the stranger had succeeded in taking him by surprise and obtaining the information which otherwise he would not have got, so that the day after Keene returned to Golden Plume Van Buren was in possession of the knowledge of his trip to White Oaks.

The sport reached the camp without meeting with any adventure on the way, and as soon as opportunity served met Adrienne Richmond in the parlor of the Metropolitan Hotel.

He related the particulars of his visit to White Oaks, but as he was not the kind of man who delighted to figure as the hero of his own story, he passed over the means by which he had managed to force the clerk to give him the information, merely saying that he had trouble to get information on account of Van Buren having taken measures to prevent any one from acquiring it, but succeeded at last. He did not hesitate though to relate how he had pulled the wool over the eyes of the postmaster.

Adrienne listened to the recital with the greatest interest.

"Evidently there has been foul play in the matter or else this Van Buren would not have taken so much trouble to prevent any one from learning all the particulars of the transfer," the girl remarked.

"Yes, that is my idea. If it was all honest—if there has not been any crooked work, Van Buren would never have thought of trying to keep anybody from discovering all the particulars of the transfer: such an idea, you know, would not have occurred to him."

"You are right!" Adrienne declared, in a tone of conviction. "His actions show that a crime has been committed, and he fears discovery."

"Conscience doth make cowards of us all!" as I heard an actor declare once in a play," the sport remarked.

"Have you formed any theory in regard to the matter?" the girl asked, thoughtfully.

"Oh, yes! I am greatly given to speculation anyway, and when I come across an affair of this kind it is the most natural thing in the world for me to try and get to the bottom of it."

"And what result have you arrived at?"

"I think that Mr. Kingsley has been murdered by Van Buren and his confederates," the sport replied in a tone which plainly showed how strong was his conviction. "I think there were three of them in the plot: Van Buren, the German, Gotterang, and this drunkard, Ned Davenport."

"That is my opinion also."

"Van Buren and the German were the men who got up the plot and they used Davenport for a tool. If you remember, his wife said that he was a splendid penman, able to imitate anybody's handwriting."

"Yes, that is true."

"The scheme was worked in this way: Van Buren and the German were the principals, they conceived the idea of robbing Kingsley of the property, having Davenport, who was able to imitate Kingsley's signature. The old man was decoyed by some means to a lonely spot, killed, and his body hidden away in a place where it was not likely to ever be discovered."

The girl shuddered, tears came into her eyes and she hid her face in her hands.

"Pardon me for speaking so bluntly," the sport said, his voice low and gentle. "I ought to have been more considerate of your feelings."

"Oh, no, it is not your fault," the girl replied, raising her head and wiping the tears away with her dainty handkerchief. "I ought to be made of sterner stuff than to yield to tears. It was but a sudden flow of emotion, and it is over now. You need not fear that I will allow my feelings to overcome me again."

"Go on! speak freely, it is necessary that we handle this matter without gloves."

"Yes, we must come to a perfect understanding in order to be able to work together," the sport remarked.

"Oh, I know that!" Adrienne exclaimed quickly. "So speak without reserve."

"The first point in this game of robbery was to remove Mr. Kingsley," Keene explained. "After he was put out of the way, the next move was to have Davenport write a note to the landlord here in Kingsley's hand, ordering his things to be sent to White Oaks."

"Then the three conspirators went to White Oaks and had the deed executed which transferred the property to Van Buren. You will notice that Van Buren himself was not present, but delegated the German to act for him. The idea of this was so that he could personate Kingsley, and there isn't any doubt in my mind that he is the man who was introduced to Carreck, the notary public, as Kingsley."

"It would be an easy matter for him to assume a disguise so as to represent an old man; a wig and beard would do the trick, and, if you notice, Carreck was got well under the influence of liquor by Davenport before he was brought over to attend to the executing of the deed."

"Yes, I noted that, and that was the reason why he was not able to give a description of Mr. Kingsley."

"Exactly; he was well soaked with liquor, so he could not tell anything about the man who gave the deed, excepting that he was well along in years."

"That would describe Mr. Kingsley, of course."

"Yes, and then, by some hocus-pocus, when the deed was signed, Davenport was the man who put the name of Kingsley to the document, although the conspirators contrived it so that it seemed to Carreck as if it was the old man who wrote the signature, and there is the whole plot in a nutshell."

Adrienne remained silent for a few minutes, her brows bent in meditation, then she raised her eyes to the face of the sport and said, abruptly:

"That you have hit upon the truth, I have no more doubt than I have that I am sitting here this moment, and now the question rises, how can we possibly avenge this cruel deed, and bring the murderers to justice, stripping them of their ill-gotten gains?"

CHAPTER XXIX.

ADRIENNE'S STORY.

KEENE pondered for some time over the matter before he attempted to answer finally he said:

"Well, you have asked me a question which I am afraid is a little too much for me. It has not been a difficult job to arrive at the opinion which I now hold; I am satisfied that Van Buren and his associates murdered Kingsley in order to gain possession of the White Gopher Mine, but being convinced of the thing in my own mind and proving it to the satisfaction of a judge and jury, or even to the citizens in general, is quite another thing."

"Yes, I understand that," Miss Richmond remarked, thoughtfully.

"The crime was committed by these men, and in the manner that I have described, I firmly believe, but the rascals have covered up their tracks so well that it is going to be an extremely difficult matter to get at them," Keene observed.

"I am not a lawyer, of course, yet I think I know enough about legal matters to be able to decide that in a case like this it would puzzle the shrewdest lawyer to know how to begin, particularly when the fight must be made in a rough, wild country like this, where the courts of law are not conducted with the smoothness and regularity of old and well settled regions."

"Oh, yes, the way is full of difficulties!" the girl exclaimed with a deep sigh.

"We cannot come out boldly and charge Van Buren and his gang with the murder of Mr. Kingsley, for we have no proof that the man is dead," the sport explained. "And if we should make the accusation Van Buren would refute it by bringing forward the landlord to testify that he had received a letter from Kingsley saying that he had disposed of the mine and was going to leave this section, and if we set up a claim that the letter was a clever forgery, it would not be listened to, for we have no proof to produce that it is so."

"Yes, very true."

"Then the transfer of the mine is all right and regular. The consideration is twenty thousand dollars, cash down, and that is the only weak

point in the whole affair. The mine is worth nearer sixty thousand than twenty in the judgment of the men in the camp who are qualified to pass an opinion about the matter, and the question as to where Van Buren got any twenty thousand dollars in hard cash might be difficult for him to answer."

"True, for such a man as he is would not be apt to have so much money."

"Correct, but it would be a hard matter to prove that, and then it is probable, if he was hard pushed on that point, that Gotterang would come forward and swear that he had loaned Van Buren six or eight thousand dollars, so the total amount would be divided among them, and it would be a hard matter to prove that it was not the truth."

"Yes, you are right; it would indeed puzzle an expert lawyer to devise a way to bring the crime of these villains home to them."

"That is true, and if we should consult a lawyer, I have no doubt he would declare, after learning the circumstances of the case, that no steps could be taken in the matter until the body of Mr. Kingsley was discovered, so that it could be proved beyond the shadow of a doubt that he was dead, and if wounds were found upon the remains, it would go to show that he had been foully dealt with; then the question would immediately arise as to who had any motive to kill him."

"Yes, I see," Adrienne observed, thoughtfully. "Suspicion then might be directed toward these men who are now in possession of the mining property."

"Of course, for a motive could be shown for the murder."

"Everything now, therefore, depends upon the discovery of the body of Mr. Kingsley?"

"Yes, and we cannot do anything in a regular way without it."

"In a regular way? I do not exactly understand."

"Why, when I say the regular way, I mean, to call in the aid of the lawyers and bring the matter into court."

"Yes, I comprehend now; but isn't that the only way we can proceed?"

"Oh, no, in this wild Western land little matters of this kind are often settled without the aid of either the lawyers or the courts. If two parties claim a mine, the dispute is sometimes settled by force of arms."

"Ah, yes, that is what is called jumping a claim."

"That is the term, and that may be termed the irregular way of going ahead. But in all cases where such a method is resorted to, the men who do the jumping ought to be sure that their claim to the property is a pretty good one, so that they may say to the citizens at large, 'This mine really belongs to me, and by rights I ought to be in possession of it, and if I resort to this violence, it is because I know that lawyers are a set of rogues, and if I have to wait until the courts do me justice I shall have to wait a precious long time.'

"It is always safe in a case of this kind to abuse the lawyers, for the average man out in this region looks upon them as a set of remorseless, hungry sharks, who live by preying upon honest men."

"Well, I have a good claim to any property of Victor Kingsley, for I am his only child," the girl announced.

"The statement does not take me by surprise, for I expected something of the kind," the sport remarked. "Although it is the general opinion in the camp that Kingsley was an old bachelor."

"No, that is not correct," Adrienne replied. "Twenty-five years ago he married a young and popular actress, Emily Richmond by name. After her marriage she left the stage. Mr. Kingsley was then in business in New York. He was nearly twenty years older than his wife, and altogether different in disposition, he being a staid, steady, sober man of business, while my mother was full of life and animation."

"I anticipate that the pair, being so ill suited to each other, did not get on together."

"No, they did not. Although my mother gave up the stage after she married, and settled down to a quiet, domestic life, yet she always regretted the step, but was wise enough not to allow my father to see that she had any longings to return to the sphere where she had figured as a bright particular star."

"It was very natural that she should feel that way," Keene remarked. "I can understand it, for I have been situated in the same way myself. The life of a sharp is a public one, and there is a certain fascination about it, after a man has followed it for some time. I have tried to retire and lead another kind of an existence a half a dozen times, but after a while I drift back to the old life again."

"Yes, I suppose that it is so with almost everybody who has ever led a public life," Adrienne observed.

"Well, my mother did her best to be satisfied with her quiet life, and although she and her husband did not get on as well as they might, there was no open quarrel until I was about two years old, then my father became

more and more exacting, and my mother, who was naturally high-spirited, resented his domineering ways, and the result was a separation."

"My father, at that time was a wealthy man and he fancied that his money would enable him to win a triumph. It was his idea to take me from my mother and so force her to return to him, but he made a mistake in thus calculating, for my mother fled with me to England, and there was easily able to make a good support for herself by returning to her old stage life, but she took the precaution to assume a different name."

"She was never traced, and when I was twelve years old she returned to this country and boldly played under her maiden name."

"In the interval my father had failed in business and gone to California for a fresh start."

"He succeeded and when I was eighteen years old my mother and myself came to San Francisco with the troupe with which we were connected."

"I neglected to state that when I became old enough my mother had allowed me to go upon the stage, and by this time I had won a good position and commanded a high salary."

"My father came to see us and offered to take me, but I refused to go with him."

"With your mother's experience in your mind I do not wonder at it," the sport remarked.

"My refusal made him very angry and he declared that henceforth he would forget that he had ever had a child."

"When I hear of a thing of this kind it makes me think that there is not so much truth after all in the old saying that blood is thicker than water," Keene declared.

"I would have gone with my father if I had been alone in the world, but no temptations would have made me desert the mother who had taken such care of me."

"You would have been ungrateful to have left her."

"Two years after the time we were in California my mother was taken ill, and for many weary months hovered between life and death. At last the end came and her sufferings ended."

"Her illness had been a long and expensive one, so that the money we had saved up was nearly all gone when the bills were settled."

"The death of the popular actress was published far and wide."

"My father, here in Golden Plume, read an account of it and wrote me a very kind letter saying that he regretted his harshness in the past and hoped I would come immediately to him so that in the future he would make amends for his errors."

"He described his mining property, said it was richly worth seventy to eighty thousand dollars, and declared that it should all be mine at his death."

"And you have that letter?" exclaimed Keene, eagerly.

"Yes, I was careful to preserve it, and as soon as I received the message I started for this place, and the rest you know."

"Well, with that letter to go on I think we will have a good fighting chance, as the legal sharps say!" the sport declared, in a most decided way.

CHAPTER XXX.

DAVENPORT'S DELUSION.

GOTTERANG sat in the office of the White Gopher Mine, busy with his books.

The German was apparently in a bad humor for every now and then he laid down his pen and glared around him in an angry way.

"I do not like it!" he muttered. "It is not right to take matters so easily. We are walking on the edge of a volcano which may burst at any moment and engulf us!"

At this point his meditations were interrupted by the entrance of Pete Baker, the watchman of the property, who came in a hurried way as though he had news of importance to communicate.

"What is it?" Gotterang demanded in his imperious way.

"Davenport is going crazy, I reckon!" Baker exclaimed.

"What makes you think so?" the German asked, evidently alarmed.

"Well, he didn't eat any dinner, and he did not come for his bottle of whisky as usual, so about three o'clock I thought I would go to his cabin and see how he was getting along."

"That was right, for he has complained lately that he was not well."

"He was lying on his bunk when I went in, flat on his back, with his eyes fixed on the roof, and he didn't take any notice of me, and when I asked him how he was, he didn't answer, but began to jabber away in the most outlandish fashion, so that I couldn't make head nor tail of what he said."

"Oh, it isn't anything serious, I think," Gotterang remarked, rising, and taking his hat. "It is probably a little attack of the horrors."

"The horrors?"

"Yes, the man with the poker, you know."

"Well, I never thought of that," the watchman exclaimed. "I shouldn't be surprised if that was the trouble."

"You see, his stomach has gone back on him, and he shut down on his whisky, which accounts for the trouble," Gotterang explained. "I will go right over, and you stop at the storehouse and get his liquor."

The two men left the office; the watchman went after the liquor, while Gotterang proceeded to Davenport's cabin.

The German entered without any ceremony.

Davenport was lying on his bunk, exactly as the watchman had described, and the gibberish which puzzled the watchman was a strange compound indeed.

"A common noun equals Y plus X, and is governed by the horizontal circumference of the unknown quantity!" he raved.

His mind was back again to his schoolboy days.

"How goes it?" Gotterang inquired, taking a seat by the side of the bunk.

Davenport sat bolt upright, stared hard at the German for a moment, and then pointed to the door.

"Don't let them in!" he cried, in a hoarse whisper.

The request was made so naturally that Gotterang looked toward the door to see who was there.

"Who is coming?" he asked, perceiving that the door was tightly closed.

"Don't you hear them whispering outside?" Davenport cried, his features beginning to work convulsively.

The German now understood that it was but a delusion.

"Oh, no, be quiet old man, there isn't anybody there!" he declared, endeavoring to soothe the other.

"I hear you! I know what you are up to!" Davenport yelled, putting his feet to the floor and glaring at the door.

"Don't be a fool!" Gotterang exclaimed. "There isn't anybody there!"

"Yes, there is a lot of hideous black men with a box of snakes!" Davenport cried. "Don't open the door or they will crawl in. See! the snakes are trying to get through the cracks now! Don't you see their ugly flat heads and their hissing tongues?"

And with distorted features, trembling in every limb, the unfortunate man pointed at the entrance.

At this point the door opened and Pete Baker appeared with the bottle of whisky.

Davenport gave a wild yell, jumped to his feet and commenced to dance around the room, endeavoring to crush the imaginary snakes.

"Kill them, kill them!" he howled. "Don't let them bite me! take them off!"

"Get a couple of men to help you and bring a lariat!" Gotterang commanded.

Baker put down the whisky and hurried out. The German barred the doorway, for Davenport manifested a disposition to rush outside to escape the snakes.

"Let me out; let me out, kill them, kill them, don't let them bite me!" he yelled, making a dash at Gotterang and jerking him from his position.

The German was a strong, stockily-built man, and, under ordinary circumstances, would have easily overcome Davenport, who was slender and not powerful.

But the delusions under which the afflicted man labored gave him almost superhuman strength, and so in despite of Gotterang's stout resistance Davenport dragged him away from the door, but the German clung to him and owing to the fact that Davenport relaxed his exertions every now and then, in order to beat away the snakes who he fancied were attacking him, the other was able to keep him from leaving the cabin.

Very glad indeed was Gotterang when Pete Baker appeared with the two men.

By this time Davenport had got to such a stage that he was but little better than a raving maniac, so the four men seized, and, after a desperate struggle, bound him with the lariat, hand and foot, then placed him on the bed, and Gotterang tried to pour some of the whisky down his throat, thinking it would help to quiet him.

But Davenport resisted and fought so that it was not possible to get him to take any of the liquor.

One of the men suggested that the doctor ought to be summoned, and although Gotterang was averse to this, yet as the rest were as strongly of the opinion that it ought to be done, he yielded to their opinions and a messenger was dispatched for the doctor.

As it happened, the "medical sharp" was in the immediate neighborhood, and so in five minutes he was by the bedside of the patient.

"I am not at all astonished at it!" the doctor declared. "I have been expecting it for some time, and the only wonder is that he did not have an attack before. He has not eaten enough to keep a chicken alive for a month, as near as I can understand, but has been keeping up entirely on whisky."

Then the doctor managed to administer a soothing draught which had the effect of quieting the raving man.

"That has acted quickly!" Gotterang exclaimed.

"Yes, I have drugged him, I had to do it; there is no other way in a case of this kind," the medical man replied.

"Well, do you think there is any danger?" the German asked.

"Yes, I do!" the doctor answered, decidedly.

"As a rule when a man has one of these attacks, there isn't; I have known men to have the horrors three or four times and pull through all right, but they were strong fellows with wonderful constitutions."

"You think there is danger then that he will not get over this attack?" Gotterang said.

"Well, I don't know as I would care to say decidedly that he will make a die of it," the doctor remarked in his abrupt way. "But if I was going to put up money on the thing I reckon I would bet on old death winning and give odds too. Still as I reckon this is the first attack—for I never heard of his having one before—he may pull through, but if he does I reckon he will never amount to much."

Then the doctor left some pills—like all medical men in the mining regions, he always carried a supply of medicines with him—and took his departure.

As Davenport had become quiet, the lariat was removed, Pete Baker delegated to watch him, and the others departed.

Gotterang returned to the office, a cloud upon his brow.

CHAPTER XXXI.

IN COUNCIL.

THE German had hardly got into the office and taken his seat before Van Buren entered.

"What is this I hear about Davenport's being under the weather?" Van Buren asked.

"He has had a pretty bad attack; the Man-with-the-poker has been after him. He has been seeing snakes, and devils, and all sorts of things," Gotterang replied.

"So one of the men told me as I came up. The doctor was here too, he said," Van Buren remarked, helping himself to a chair.

"Yes, I would not have sent for him, but the men thought that I ought to and as I was afraid it would make talk if I did not, I complied with their wishes."

"It would not have been wise to refuse, so long as the rest thought that it ought to be," Van Buren observed, thoughtfully.

"That was my idea, but if I could have done as I wanted to about the matter I would have let the scoundrel rave to death!" the German exclaimed with bitter accent.

"You are right; he is a scoundrel," the other observed, slowly.

"Yes, one of the cunning ones who contrives to keep in the background—who arranges it so he can profit by the rascality, and yet if discovery comes he could plead that he was but an unwilling tool in the hands of others."

"That is the game he plays. I have been in hopes for the last month or so that the end would soon come, and in order to bring about that desirable result I have taken care that he should have all the liquor he wanted."

"Oh, I understood the game, of course," the German declared. "And I fancy the end is not far off now, for the doctor says it is his belief that he will not get over it."

"Is there any danger of his betraying anything in his ravings?"

"No, none at all! It is the regular horrors he has—sees all sorts of imaginary things, and, in fact, acts like a lunatic," Gotterang replied. "He is not a strong man, you know, yet it took four of us to get him on his bunk and tie him fast."

"That is usually the way in all such cases. Maniacs are always possessed of wonderful strength."

"He is resting quietly enough now; the doctor told me that he had drugged him."

"Given him a dose of morphine it is likely, or something of that sort," Van Buren observed.

"That is what is usually used in such cases."

"And he left some pills which were to be given him if he began to get violent again," and the German produced the box of pills for the other's inspection.

"Morphine, I reckon," Van Buren remarked, after taking a look at them. "How many did he say to give at a time?"

"Two of them, and if the dose did not quiet him, two more."

"Couldn't you make a mistake and give him all that are in the box at once?" Van Buren asked, with a grim smile. "That would be apt to make him keep quiet."

"I would like to, if I wasn't afraid that it would be discovered," Gotterang answered, with a dark scowl.

"One thing is certain, and that is we will never be able to breathe freely while the fellow lives."

"That is true, he will always be a thorn in our sides."

"Let us hope the doctor is right in his guess, and that this attack will finish him," Van Buren remarked.

"And now, to change the subject, I have some news from White Oaks which is rather

disagreeable." And he drew a letter out of his pocket as he spoke.

It was the letter which Sandy Smith had written in reference to the sport's visit.

Gotterang listened attentively while Van Buren read the letter to him.

"What do you think of it?" Van Buren asked, when he came to the end.

The German shook his head.

"You don't like it, eh?"

"No, I do not!"

"It looks as if somebody meant business?"

"Yes, it certainly does."

"Do you recognize the man by the description?"

"I should judge that it is this sport, Keene."

"Not a doubt about it!"

"And he has succeeded in obtaining the information that he wanted in spite of an effort to prevent him," and the German shook his head in a gloomy way.

"Yes, the man succeeded although I reckoned we had blocked the way. Still, the information does not amount to much. I am not worrying so much in regard to the fact that he obtained what he sought as I am that it shows that these parties mean business," Van Buren declared.

"Oh, yes, they are in earnest."

"I carefully considered the matter over as I walked up from the post-office, and I think I have not neglected any of the points," Van Buren observed in a thoughtful way.

"We arranged the affair so carefully that I do not think it is possible for any one to find a weak point," Van Buren continued.

"You are right, I think," Gotterang declared. "I too have reflected long and earnestly about the matter, and though I did not know that any one had succeeded in getting at the facts yet I went upon the assumption that such a thing might happen, and my conclusion was that it would not be possible for any one to produce any proof that there had been anything wrong about the matter. The parties who investigated might have suspicions that all was not as it appeared, but that would not be enough to make trouble."

"No, in a case of this kind suspicious don't count," Van Buren remarked, with a grim smile.

"But this letter puts us on our guard," he continued. "We know now that there is an enemy in the field and we must keep our eyes open, for there is no telling when an attack will be made, although I will admit that, under the circumstances, I do not see how any movement can be made."

"Neither do I. I have no doubt that this Miss Richmond is some relation to Kingsley although she has not set up any such claim."

"She is an uncommonly shrewd girl, I think, and I suppose she has been waiting to ascertain just how matters stood before coming forward in her true character, but I agree with you that she is, probably, a relative of Kingsley, but even if she is his daughter, or niece, or anything of that kind, I don't see how she can possibly find any excuse for interfering in this matter."

"I have the deed from Kingsley, and I defy the sharpest lawyer to find anything irregular about it. Kingsley was not a lunatic, you know, but a man in full possession of all his senses—there are fifty men in the town who will swear to that—and, of course, he was able to buy or sell without being under the necessity of consulting any heirs that he might have in regard to the matter."

"Very true; but suppose the claim is made that Kingsley is dead?" the German asked, in a low and cautious tone, and he glanced around as he spoke as though he was afraid of being overheard.

"Well, in order to do anything they will have to prove, first, that the man is dead, which I fancy will be an extremely difficult matter, and then that he died before the deed of the mine to me was executed, and that will be more difficult still," Van Buren declared.

"Yes, that is true, but, as far as I can see, they must go ahead on these lines," Gotterang remarked.

"Suspicious are not proof, and mere unsupported assertions will not have much weight with anybody," the other replied.

"Suppose such a claim as this is made," Van Buren continued, "who would believe it? And could we not rout them, horse, foot, and dragoons, by calling upon them to back up their assertions by some proof, and if they could not do it—and they cannot—they would be the laughing-stock of the town."

This declaration made it evident that the speaker did not feel at all alarmed.

"Oh, our position is a strong one, I am well aware of that, and I should not feel in the least degree alarmed if this sport was not mixed up in the matter," the German remarked.

"Well, he is a good boxer, and I have no doubt a smart fellow generally," Van Buren said, in a patronizing way. "But I fancy that a matter of this kind is a little out of his line, and I am not inclined to regard him as being particularly dangerous."

Gotterang shook his head.

"You don't agree with me about that, eh?"

"Well, if this affair was going to be fought

out in the law courts I would agree with you, but as I don't see a chance for the party to try anything of that kind, I do not believe they will go ahead in that way."

"I understand what you are driving at!" Van Buren exclaimed. "You think there is a prospect that the girl may set up a claim to the mine, as the legal heir of Kingsley, stating that he is dead, and attempt to jump the claim?"

"Yes, that is the only course open to her as far as I can see."

"Well, I agree with you that that is about all she can do, and I admit that if it came to a struggle of that kind this sport would be apt to prove to be a dangerous customer."

"That is my notion!" Gotterang exclaimed, with a very emphatic shake of the head.

"A game of that kind may be tried, but in a camp like the Golden Plume it would not do even for a young and pretty woman to try anything that looked like downright robbery," Van Buren observed. "If she set up a claim to this property, and had this sport raise a gang to seize it, without going to the trouble to prove that she had a right to the mine, the whole town would be up in arms against her. In a small, wild, and lawless camp, away off in the wilderness, such a trick might be worked, but never in Golden Plume!"

"That is true; she would have to make out a pretty strong case before she would be allowed to go ahead without interference, but what I am afraid of is that her party might jump the claim first and explain afterwards," Gotterang observed.

"There is something in that, of course, and we must be on our guard," Van Buren replied. "One thing you must bear in mind—we have got a number of men on the premises, and it will take as many more to get us out; and as from this time forth we will be on the watch for an attack, it will not be an easy matter to take us by surprise. Then, too, I shall now set spies to work to keep their eyes upon this sport, and if he attempts to raise a gang in Golden Plume, you can rely upon it that I will soon be informed of the fact."

"Yes, yes, we must not neglect any precautions."

"Oh, you can rest assured that I will not!" Van Buren declared. "At present I think all the advantage is on our side, and I shall do my best to have the situation remain in that way."

"From the fact that this sport went to White Oaks and examined the records, it is certain that he is in league with this Miss Richmond, and will make us trouble if he can," the German said, in a thoughtful way, and with a dark look on his face.

"Yes, there is no doubt of that."

"Would it not be wise for us to arrange a plan to strike a blow at him, without waiting for him to make another move?"

"Well, I don't know—perhaps it would," the other replied, evidently favorably impressed with the idea.

"I think the matter could be arranged, and without much trouble," the German declared.

"How would you proceed?"

"Set some of Liverpool Jack's gang on him; the men who hang out in the Royal Gin Palace are eager for a chance to get even with the sport, and if a man was to put up a hundred dollars, the chances are big that some of Jack's gang would try to settle the sport for good and all."

"The scheme is worth trying, and I will look into it."

"Another point: Are you sure that a certain thing is all right? The earth generally keeps a secret, but sometimes the wild animals or some accident defeats the plan."

"Well thought of!" Van Buren exclaimed. "I will take a stroll out that way to-morrow, and see for myself if everything is all right."

"We must not lose a point, even if all the advantages do seem to be on our side," the German declared.

"Well, we may be a little annoyed, but we arranged the matter so carefully that it will take a miracle to upset us," Van Buren declared, boastfully. "And the days of miracles are over," he added.

CHAPTER XXXII. AN UNEXPECTED MOVE.

THE medical sharp of Golden Plume was an odd, eccentric individual, a man apt to take peculiar notions into his head, and when an idea took possession of him he was apt to try to carry it out regardless of the consequences.

"That poor blaggard hasn't long to live," the doctor muttered, as he proceeded down the street—he spoke with a slight touch of the brogue when he became excited, or deeply interested.

"He is a miserable rascal, but thin that is no reason why he should be hurried out of the world before his time, and it is certain that if he stays up at the mine it is mighty little care he will get."

"His wife is a decent sort of woman; maybe now that he is booked for the other world she will be willing to help smooth the pathway a little for him."

"Shure! it will do no harm to have a talk wid her about the matter."

And, acting on this decision, the doctor proceeded to the hotel.

He explained to the landlord that he wanted to speak to Mrs. Davenport, and was escorted to the parlor by that gentleman; when the serio-comic made her appearance, the landlord discreetly retiring.

"It is not on good terms ye are wid your husband?" the doctor questioned.

The lady cast an inquiring glance at the medical man, for she was surprised by the speech, but being well acquainted with the doctor she understood that he had an object in speaking as he did apart from idle curiosity.

"Well, I am not on particularly bad terms," she replied. "We do not live together, and I have to support myself, but you know the reason for that as well as I do. If the man would behave himself and stop drinking we would get along all right, but he will not do it."

"That is true enough, particularly whin he has kind friends who supply him wid all the liquor he wants, bad 'cess to them, I say!"

"Yes, I know who you mean—the White Gopher people," Lily Davenport remarked. "I spoke to Mr. Van Buren once about the matter, and told him that he was not doing my husband any good."

"And what did he say?"

"Oh, he spoke smoothly enough; he is a good talker, you know," Lily Davenport replied. "He declared that he did not think I ought to blame him for giving Ned a little liquor every now and then, for he had become so used to it that it was a question if he would be able to get along without it."

"Well, there is a d'ale of truth in that," the doctor remarked. "I do not doubt that if your husband's supply of drink was suddenly cut off he would suffer, but then there is no need of anybody's giving it to him by the pailful."

"Yes, that is what I think, and although Van Buren said that it was not true that my husband could get all the liquor he wanted at the mine at any time, yet I have been told that such is the fact."

"I have heard so, too, and I do not doubt that it is the truth."

"But why do you speak of this subject?" Mrs. Davenport asked, with natural curiosity. "Why do you interest yourself in the matter?"

"Well, I have just come from your husband, and it is a sick man he is. He is up at the mine now stretched out on the flat of his back, and it is a question if he ever gets on his legs again."

"I am not surprised, for I have been expecting some such a thing for a long time. I will not stoop to deceive you, doctor, by saying that I am deeply shocked by the matter, for I am not!" Lily Davenport declared, frankly. "The man has treated me in such a way that every vestige of the love I once bore him has fled, never to return, and I am willing to admit, too, that I never was over head and ears in love with him, and when I look back and reflect upon the past, it is a mystery to me how it was that I ever came to marry the man."

"Mrs. Davenport, I do not think any the worse of you becase you don't hesitate to say what you think!" the doctor declared. "And it isn't any wonder to me that you feel as you do about the matter."

"The man has acted in such a way as to utterly destroy what little love I once had for him. I feel sorry for him, of course, as I would feel sorry for any man that I knew was drinking himself to death, and I would be willing to do anything in my power to make him comfortable."

"That is jist what I thought!" the doctor declared. "And that is why I have come to see you. It is my idea that Davenport ought to be moved; he needs care and attention, and there's no one at the mine but a lot of rough men to look after him."

"Yes, and though Van Buren pretends to think a lot of Ned, and has always declared that he should never want for anything while he lived, yet it seems to me that he is not exactly acting like a friend in allowing Ned to have all the liquor he wants, when he must see that it is killing him!" the serio-comic declared.

"That idea has come to me. Upon me would! if Van Buren was anxious to get your husband out of the world he could not have gone to work on a better plan."

"Well, I don't know what to make of the matter, but it seems odd to me," Lily Davenport remarked, thoughtfully. "Ned, you know, don't really do any work to speak of at the mine, and yet he gets his salary just the same, and the idea that Van Buren may get tired of paying him for doing nothing and discharge him one of these days, never seems to enter his head."

"That is true! If he was one of the owners of the mine he couldn't be more independent."

"I tried to frighten him once by saying that Van Buren would give him the grand bounce one of these days if he did not leave liquor alone and attend to his business a little better, but he only laughed in my face and declared that there wasn't any danger of that; he was a fixture in the mine, and as long as El Van Buren and Got-

terang were connected with the White Gopher property he would be sure of a job."

"It is a very strange affair," and the doctor shook his head as much as to say that the riddle was too much for him.

"Yes, I don't puzzle my brains over it any more. It may be that Van Buren and the German are great friends of Ned, but if they have any judgment at all they ought to be able to see that the liquor is killing him."

"He is going to have a narrow shave of it this time!" the doctor declared. "And it is my opinion that he will not pull through unless he is taken away from that mine and put where he will have careful nursing. If he is allowed to remain where he is at present, and given all the liquor he wants, the odds are about a hundred to one that he will never be after getting on his feet again!"

"Well, I am perfectly willing to take care of him, and you can rest assured that I will do all I can for Ned, but, really, the hotel is no place for him, and I do not believe Mr. Bozain would be willing to have him come here either."

"Oh, no! he could not be brought here!" the doctor exclaimed. "But I will tell you what I will do: I will give up my cabin to him; I can be after finding quarters here at the hotel for a week or so, and you are quite welcome to my shanty."

"I am sure I am very much obliged, doctor, for your kind offer, and as I know you mean it I will accept, and thank you heartily, too!" the serio-comic declared.

"It is the only chance the man has for his life!" the doctor averred. "I will do the best I can to pull him through, and I want him in a place where I know my orders about his treatment will be obeyed."

"You can rely upon my following them to the letter!" Lily Davenport exclaimed.

"Yes, I know that, and that is why I am anxious you shall take care of him."

"But here is another point; the White Gopher people may object to your taking him away?" the doctor suggested.

"He is my husband, and I reckon I have a right to take him!" the serio-comic declared, spiritedly. "I shall go armed. I have a good pair of six-shooters, and I hav'n't lived all these years on the frontier without knowing how to use them; so, if any of the White Gopher people attempt to prevent me from taking my husband away, you can depend upon it that there will be trouble, and somebody may get hurt!"

"That is the way to talk!" the doctor declared, admiringly. "I will have a litter rigged to carry him on, and while it is getting ready I will jist pass the word around town among the lads so there will be fifteen or twenty of them to go with us, and if the White Gopher people attempt to interfere with the procession there will be apt to be a ruction."

"You can depend upon it that I will stand up to the rack!" Mrs. Davenport declared. "And if they are wise they will not attempt to interfere with me!"

"There will be the devil's own row if they do!" Finnigan exclaimed.

"In half an hour I will be ready for yez!" was the doctor's parting remark, and then he hurried away.

Lily Davenport went to her room and prepared herself for the expedition.

She was a woman of dauntless courage, and having made up her mind to take her husband from the mine, was determined to go ahead, no matter what the consequences might be.

After finishing her preparations she ascended to the street, and standing in the portal of the hotel waited for the arrival of the doctor and his assistants.

Finnigan was prompt.

Within twenty minutes from the time he left the hotel he was back again with a rude litter, constructed out of poles and blankets, and had organized a force of a dozen men to assist him.

Lily Davenport came out, and the party proceeded toward the White Gopher Mine.

The march of the "procession" excited universal attention, and by the time the mine was reached a crowd of fully fifty people had collected.

The men in the mine saw the crowd coming, and Gotterang, jumping at once to the conclusion that war had begun, and an attempt was going to be made to jump the mine, hastily bade his men knock off work and prepare to resist the attack.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

AN ACCIDENT.

THE German got his men together, all of them armed, ready for a fight.

As it happened, he was forced to take command, for Van Buren was away.

The White Gopher miners were very much astonished by this sudden call to arms, for they had no idea that there was any trouble brewing.

Gotterang, in his alarm, when he discovered the crowd approaching, had let the cat out of the bag.

"They are coming to jump the mine!" he ex-

claimed, when he called his men out. "And we must beat them off!"

The men complied with his request to get their arms readily enough, for it is one of the unwritten laws of the mining region that the workmen in a mine must be willing to fight as well as work if the occasion demands it.

Speculation was in each eye as the crowd approached, for the reason for the attack was a mystery to them, the German excepted.

But when the crowd got near enough so that the White Gopher men were able to make out who were in the throng, they came immediately to the conclusion that the German had made a mistake when he supposed that the party were coming with the idea of seizing the mine.

They saw that the doctor, Finnigan, was at the head of the party, and by his side walked Lily Davenport.

Then, too, no arms were visible—no revolvers or rifles were brandished in the air, as would undoubtedly have been the case if the crowd were bent on war.

Pete Baker, the watchman, who was noted for being a great talker, was the first to voice the views of the miners.

"Say, this ain't no war-party," he exclaimed. "That is Doc Finnigan, and the woman is Mrs. Davenport! The Doc has been to tell Lily that her husband is sick, and she has come right out to see about it."

"Yes, yes, that's so!" cried three or four of the others.

"But why does the crowd come, too?" Gotterang demanded, suspiciously.

The men who carried the litter were in the rear, and hidden from the eyes of the White Gopher people by the ones in front; if the miners had been able to see the litter they would immediately have guessed why the crowd came.

"Wal, I reckon it don't take much to raise a gang in Golden Plume!" Pete Baker declared.

"A dog fight is good for the biggest kind of a crowd at any time!"

"What on earth are you after?" the German exclaimed in a rather sulky way as the procession came up.

"Upon me wourd! it looks as if you had prepared to give us a warm reception!" the doctor remarked with a quizzical look at the rifles of the miners.

"Well, when I saw such a gang coming I thought there was mischief afoot, and so got ready to meet it," Gotterang explained.

"We do not come on war intent but on an errand of peace and mercy," Finnigan replied.

"You know Mrs. Davenport of course."

The German nodded, but there was a puzzled look upon his face.

He understood that it was natural for Mrs. Davenport to visit her sick husband, natural also for the doctor to accompany her, but why such a simple thing should attract so large a crowd was a mystery.

"You have a very sick man here, Mr. Gotterang and I considered that it was my duty to tell Mrs. Davenport just how he was," the doctor remarked.

Gotterang nodded again.

"And like a true wife, sir, she has made up her mind to take care of her sick husband!" Finnigan announced.

It was no secret to the miners that Ned Davenport and his wife were not on good terms, and this action on the part of the lady impressed them most favorably, as was evident from the expression upon their faces.

But the German did not like it at all, and his face grew dark as he replied:

"Well, I don't see how the matter can be arranged. We haven't any accommodations here for women."

"Oh, don't be afther troubling your head about that!" the doctor exclaimed; "Mrs. Davenport hasn't any idea of trespassing upon your hospitality."

"How can she take care of her husband then?" Gotterang demanded, bluntly.

"Aisily enough! Don't you be afther worrying yerself about that!" Finnigan retorted, not liking the tone in which the German spoke.

"I have given up my cabin to her, and we have come to move Ned down there, do ye mind!"

The German stared blankly for a moment at the Irishman.

Despite his strong powers of self-control he could not help showing in his face how extremely distasteful to him was this idea.

"Going to take Ned away!" he exclaimed in a manner which plainly showed that he did not know exactly what to say.

"That is what we are going to do," the doctor replied.

"But it will be apt to kill the man to move him in his present condition!" Gotterang declared.

"Oh, no, not at all—not the Paste danger! We have a stretcher here for him, and all the b'yes have come along so as to give a hand; we'll carry him down to my place as aisy as you please!"

"That is all nonsense! It will kill the man to move him, I tell you!" the German cried, roughly.

The blood of the doctor was up in a moment.

"Upon me wourd! you had better be afther telling me, that I do not know anything about me profession!" Finnigan cried, hotly. "Which ought to be the best judge—a man like yourself who knows nothing about the matter, or a medical professor of my experience?"

"Well, he is not going to be moved and that is all there is to it!" Gotterang declared, angrily.

This was something that he did not dare to sanction. At all hazards Ned Davenport must be kept on the place.

This decided announcement was Lily Davenport's cue to speak.

"Do you mean to say that you will attempt to prevent me from taking my husband away to a place where he can have good care and where I, his wife, can see that he does not want for anything?" the serio-comic demanded, her face flushed with anger.

"I don't intend that you shall kill the man by attempting to remove him!" the German cried, his features white with rage.

"It is you who want to kill him by keeping him here where he will suffer!" Lily Davenport exclaimed. "Is he a slave, then, that I, his lawful wife, am denied the right to do what is best for him—and I am backed by medical advice, too. The doctor knows what is best!"

"The doctor be cursed!" the German cried, and he made a movement to reach for his revolver, which he had returned to his belt at the beginning of the conversation.

These foolish words, and the action which followed, brought on an immediate commotion.

No two men in the crowd agreed exactly afterward in regard to how the thing happened, but as far as any of them could tell, the doctor "went for" his revolver the moment the insulting words reached his ears, and everybody else on the ground proceeded to get out a weapon.

There was a sharp, quick report; Gotterang threw up his hands, staggered forward and fell on his face.

Nobody knew who fired the shot, so great was the confusion, but as far as could be discovered, it was a purely accidental one, and as the German was shot in the back, it was supposed that some one of the White Gopher miners, in the excitement of the moment, pulled the trigger without knowing it.

It was an accident, anyhow, and everybody was conscious of it the moment after the tragedy occurred, and that was the reason, probably, why the firer of the ball was not discovered.

If any of the miners knew, they judged that it was wise to keep the secret.

Gotterang had been killed immediately, for when the miners raised him from the ground he was breathing his last.

"It is an unfortunate accident," the doctor observed. "But if he hadn't been such an obstinate blaggard it would not have happened. Thunder and turf! who ever heard of anybody trying to keep a wife from taking care of a sick husband!"

There was not a man in the crowd who did not think that the German had made a big idiot of himself by acting as he had, and the dead man had no mourners, for Gotterang was not a favorite in the camp.

Even the White Gopher miners, who worked under him, did not like the man.

After the German's death no one ventured to make any objections to the removal, and so Davenport, still under the influence of the drug, was removed to the doctor's cabin, where his wife took up her residence, and set out to make the sick man as comfortable as possible.

The affair created a deal of excitement in the camp, and it was the universal opinion that no bigger idiot than the German had ever set foot in the town.

"What will Van Buren say when he hears of it?" was the general cry.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

FATE INTERPOSES.

ABOUT an hour or so after the tragedy occurred, while all the camp were busy discoursing it, a new subject for conversation came up.

The veteran bummer, Joe Bowers, made his appearance in the camp, bearing the startling intelligence that Elliott Van Buren had been thrown from his horse and badly hurt, in a rocky ravine a half-mile from the town.

"Upon me word! it is lucky that the stretcher is ready," Finnigan declared.

A party was at once organized, headed by the doctor, and under the guidance of Joe Bowers, proceeded to the assistance of the injured man.

Van Buren was badly injured, his right leg was broken and a couple of his ribs; but he bore the transportation to the town with wonderful courage, although in great pain.

After being put to bed in his cabin, Finnigan proceeded to make the wounded man as comfortable as possible.

Van Buren had requested that all should leave the room, so as not to interfere with the medical man's work.

"This is a pretty bad accident, isn't it, doctor?" Van Buren asked, when the two were alone and Finnigan began his task.

"Faith! ye may say that, and devil a taste of a lie! And it was a lucky thing for you that you

were found so soon afther it happened!" the doctor declared. "It was a lonely spot, and ye might have laid there for days if this fat bum-mer hadn't happened to come along. It was well for you that the spalpeen took it into his head to prospect for gold up that same ravine, although it don't say much for his skill as a prospector, for no one but a fool would think of looking for color in such a place."

"The infernal scoundrel! I will murder him when I get over this!" Van Buren cried, in a sudden outburst of passion.

The doctor suspended his operations and looked at his patient in astonishment.

"What's that?" he exclaimed. "Would yez be afther harming the man who brought assistance to yez?"

"Yes, I would, for the infernal villain was the cause of the accident!"

Finnigan was amazed at this statement.

"Oh, it is a fact. You need not stare, doctor. I know what I am talking about, although I have no doubt that the scoundrel does not suspect that I know what he was up to, but I do."

"Upon me wourd! this is a regular mystery!" Finnigan exclaimed.

"Yes, that is true, but I can easily explain the matter. I can depend upon you to keep quiet about the thing?"

"Oh, yis! don't ye worry about that!"

"I have been sticking to work pretty steadily lately so I went out for a little ride this afternoon, as I felt the need of exercise, and I went up to the north through that ravine, where I was thrown, as a short cut to the prairie beyond."

"The country is rough and broken, you know, and so I couldn't go on faster than a walk, and after I got into the ravine, I happened to glance behind me and I caught a glimpse of this fellow."

"When I turned my head he pretended to be prospecting, but I reckoned at once that he was playing the spy upon me."

"Why in the world should he do that?" the doctor asked in wonder.

"Well, I don't know; he may have thought that I was after a 'lead,' and if he played the spy upon me he might strike a rich find," Van Buren replied, but from the way he spoke the keen-witted doctor guessed that the speaker was not telling his true surmise in regard to the man's action.

"Yis, I see," Finnigan observed, as though perfectly satisfied with the explanation.

"Anyway, he was dogging me, I thought, and in order to satisfy myself on this point, I slyly kept watch of his movements as I rode on, and the result of this proceeding on my part was that I did not take proper care of my horse, the brute stepped into a hole, and I got a tumble which will be apt to lay me up for some time."

"True for yez!"

"And so you see, that if it had not been for this scoundrel, the accident would not have happened, but I will get square with him as soon as I get on my legs again!" Van Buren declared.

"Well, small blame to you if you do," the doctor observed.

"And it is a mighty grave thing this accident happening to you to-day, too," Finnigan continued. "It jist carries out the old adage that misfortunes seldom come single."

"Why, what other misfortune has happened?" Van Buren asked in astonishment.

"Gotterang, ye know?"

"Yes?"

"He has passed in his checks."

The blow struck Van Buren with the force of a thunder-clap.

"Is it possible?" he cried.

"Possible it is!"

And then the doctor told the story of what had occurred.

Gloomy indeed was Van Buren's face as he listened to the tale.

"This is bad news," he said, slowly, when the doctor finished the recital.

"Yis, and then this accident to you right on the heels of it; first, Ned Davenport is put on the flat of his back, then Gotterang gets his ticket for soup, and now you are laid up for a month or two."

"Yes, it is very odd indeed," Van Buren said, his voice sounding strangely hard and unnatural. "If we White Gopher people were a band of robbers now, a superstitious man might be inclined to say that the hand of heaven was in it."

"Faix! it would look as if fate was striking at yez, but luck will run that way sometimes," the doctor observed.

This ended the conversation upon the subject; the doctor finished his work and departed, leaving Van Buren to meditations which were gloomy in the extreme.

"Luck!" he exclaimed, "well, perhaps it is luck; what is luck but fate? One thing is certain, the game is getting desperate."

"Gotterang is dead! Cut down in his tracks without a moment's warning."

"Ned Davenport is in the hands of his wife and she is a friend of this Richmond girl, and no friend to me; I am helpless on my back without a soul upon whom I can depend to aid me in parrying any blow that may be aimed at me."

"It will be a month or two maybe before I will be myself again, and what may not happen in that time, with active and persevering foes hard upon my track.

"I do not believe that Davenport is going to get over this attack. It is my belief that he is doomed—and that death will come quickly, too!

"When he finds that he is about to take the final step into the dark, will he have courage enough to hold on—to keep from telling the story which at such a moment will be apt to hang heavy upon his conscience?

"Ah, that is a difficult question to answer," and the musser shook his head.

"In my opinion he will weaken at the last moment; his wife will prate to him of the dread hereafter and urge him to clear his conscience before he departs. All the women are more or less superstitious, and the odds are big that he will weaken.

"If he tells the truth though it will show that he was more to blame than either Gotterang or myself; that although we carried out the plot, he was the one that suggested and planned it.

"But as far as that goes, he will be likely to palter with his conscience; he will try to make himself believe, and will be apt to swear, that Gotterang and myself led him on, and that if it had not been for us the job would never have been done.

"Well, I suppose that is true enough, for he would never have had the courage to carry it out, although he did suggest the idea in the beginning.

"I am helpless, and must allow matters to take their own course, and if the storm breaks, all I can do is to take refuge in a stout denial, and defy them to prove that I am guilty.

"Ah, how true the old Biblical saying is about how will it profit a man to gain the world and lose his own soul."

It will be seen from these reflections that the lot of Elliott Van Buren was far from being an enviable one.

Events turned out as he anticipated.

Ned Davenport awoke from his stupor to find that the hand of death was upon him.

The doctor told him that he had better arrange his earthly affairs, for his hours of life were numbered.

The news of Gotterang's death and Van Buren's accident were made known to him and immediately his soul was seized with mighty terror.

"The way of the transgressor is hard," he murmured.

His wife perceived that there was a weight upon his mind, and she urged him to make his peace with Heaven before it was too late.

And Davenport, feeling that the shadow of the grave was upon him, called in the doctor and the landlord and made a full confession of the way in which he, with Elliott Van Buren and Herman Gotterang, had murdered Victor Kingsley in order to gain possession of the White Gopher Mine.

Not a detail of the crime did he omit, and he confessed, too, that the plan was conceived in his own brain when he discovered that Mr. Kingsley had determined not to put up with his neglect of duty and was about to discharge him.

The stealing of the property, after the old man had been murdered, was arranged in the way that Keen Billy had imagined. Davenport's marvelous skill as a penman had made the task an easy one.

The body of the old man had been buried in the ravine where Van Buren was thrown from his horse, and his presence there was due to a desire to see if the remains had been tampered with.

This disclosure created an immense excitement. The ravine was examined, and human bones found in the exact spot where Davenport said the murdered man had been buried, but it was not possible for any one to identify the bones and so to be able to swear positively in regard to the matter, still there were few in the town who doubted the tale.

An hour after the confession was made Ned Davenport joined his brother-in-crime in the shadow land.

Van Buren kept a stiff upper lip, as the camp declared. He said that the confession was the story of a lunatic and not worth notice.

Then Adrienne told her tale, revealed her identity and claimed the White Gopher property as Victor Kingsley's daughter, but she declared she would not take any active steps in the matter until Van Buren was able to defend himself, so the camp waited anxiously for Van Buren to get well. He played 'possum though, pretended to be disabled when he could get about, and one night fled from the town.

"Let him go!" Adrienne declared, when she heard the news, "Heaven will punish him!" The man was never heard of again.

The girl came in possession of the mine, and after the affair was settled, formed a stock company, and turned the property over to them.

"I will return to the stage," she said. "and to the East, which loves me well!"

Ten thousand dollars in hard cash she gave Keen Billy, which the sport took thankfully.

"If you were not married, and I was the kind

of girl to fall in love, we might make a match," she said, laughingly. "But, as it is, we will be content with being true friends!"

"So-long!" cried the sport, and so they parted.

THE END.

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